

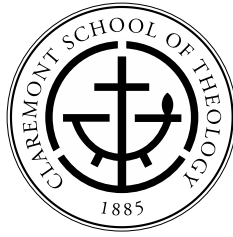
THE CYCLE OF SOTERIOLOGY:
A PROCESS-REFORMED DIALOGUE ON SOVEREIGNTY, TOTAL DEPRAVITY,
PROVIDENCE, AND ELECTION

A Dissertation
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the Faculty of
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In Partial Fulfillment
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by
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ABSTRACT

THE CYCLE OF SOTERIOLOGY: A PROCESS-REFORMED DIALOGUE ON SOVEREIGNTY, TOTAL DEPRAVITY, PROVIDENCE, AND ELECTION by

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Claremont School of Theology, 2020

The Reformed tradition of Christian theology emphasizes several doctrines that are becoming increasingly problematic for people living in today's interrelated, globalized world. Chief among these problematic doctrines are divine sovereignty, total depravity, divine providence, and election. At the same time, process thought has rightfully rushed to rid theology of concepts and philosophies that are not adequate for the world we experience. Unfortunately, this can sometimes result in neglecting traditional theological doctrines that still have insights to offer. By bringing process thought and the Reformed tradition into a dialogue in these problematic areas, each provides a corrective for the other as they learn from one another and are mutually transformed. In this project, the soteriological movements of God and the world in relationship with one another are explored, with the result that both process and Reformed theologies are seen as portraying the same movements of a cycle, albeit with differing emphases that allow them to learn from one another.

In order to accomplish this, the relevant concepts are explored through the writings of major theologians from process thought and Reformed theology. The process thought concepts of the primordial nature of God, the lure toward novelty, sin, novelty itself, the consequent nature of God, and Christology are all examined. The works of many process theologians are

considered here, especially Alfred North Whitehead and John Cobb. Next, the Reformed doctrines of divine sovereignty, total depravity, providence, Christ, and election are analyzed. Here, the works of John Calvin, Karl Barth, and Shirley Guthrie figure prominently among other Reformed theologians. After the traditions have been individually explored and analyzed, they are then brought together in order to show their points of agreement, similarity, and irreconcilable difference.

Taking the heart of the God-world relationship from the Reformed doctrines of sovereignty, total depravity, providence, and election and interpreting them using the framework of process philosophy rather than substance metaphysics to create a process-Reformed understanding of the cycle of soteriology allows for these two divergent traditions to find points of agreement and learning in one another. Through this project's work on bringing together these two theologies in their cycles of soteriology, the Reformed tradition is able to have a more adequate understanding of the God-world relationship in how it applies to the world we experience, and process thought can reclaim classical Christian doctrines while also emphasizing aspects of God that are often neglected by mainstream process theologians. This project shows that by bringing the process thought exemplified by Alfred North Whitehead into dialogue with Reformed theology as seen in Karl Barth and Shirley Guthrie, the problematic Reformed soteriological concepts of divine sovereignty, total depravity, divine providence, and election can be understood in more adequate terms for the world in which we live through the lens of process thought's conceptions of novelty and divine natures, while also providing process thought with points of commonality and with unique emphases through dialogue with the Reformed tradition since they are both reflecting the same soteriological cycle of movements in the God-world relationship.

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Introduction

Process thought is a school of philosophy and theology that can be characterized by the twofold emphases of creativity and relationality. Reality is seen as an ongoing creative process wherein creativity is “the universal of universals characterizing ultimate matter of fact,” which “is the advance from disjunction to conjunction, creating a novel entity other than the entities given in disjunction.”¹ And reality is also seen as inherently relational, with every moment internally related to every other moment since “every item in its universe is involved in each concrescence.”² Alfred North Whitehead has been the primary shaping force for process thought, and can rightly be regarded as a foundational figure in process theology, to the extent that the word foundational can be applied in process philosophy. Process thought, guided by Whitehead and his successors, represents a significant change from the substance metaphysics that has dominated theology for centuries. Instead of the static and mostly isolated beings that can be found in substance metaphysics, especially when it comes to the divine, in process thought we instead find profoundly interrelated entities moving together in the ongoing advance of creativity.

Given its focus on creativity and relationality as an alternative metaphysics, process philosophy has successfully engaged with many religious traditions over the decades. Within the Christian tradition, the lens of process thought has been used by the Methodist tradition most significantly, but also by Catholicism and other Protestant traditions. This is due not only to certain resonances with these traditions, but also because influential process theologians have come from them. One Christian theological tradition that has not seen much dialogue with

¹ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne, corrected ed. (1978; repr., New York: The Free Press, 1985), 21.

² Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 22.

process thought but deserves more attention is the Reformed tradition, including John Calvin and Karl Barth as major historical figures and Shirley Guthrie as a recent representative. In this project, the Christian Reformed tradition is brought into dialogue with process thought.

One of the most significant obstacles to this dialogue is the problem that takes center stage. The Reformed tradition is characterized by a wide diversity of theological figures, almost all of whom share “a pervasive focus upon the trinitarian God, particularly his sovereignty and salvific work on behalf of humankind.”³ On the surface this is at odds with the chief characteristics of process thought, since God’s sovereignty and one-way relationship with humanity are not necessarily relational nor an ongoing creative process. Particularly problematic for process theology are the Reformed concepts of divine sovereignty, the total depravity of humanity, divine providence, and election. These problematic doctrines are traditionally understood as follows.

Divine sovereignty is viewed as “God’s ultimate Lordship and rule over the universe so that the divine will is supreme over all else.”⁴ Through this Reformed concept of the divine, God is understood as unique in all of reality through God’s superiority over everything else. God is separate from the rest of reality in being above all creation and guiding it through God’s will. God is not influenced or impacted by the world, but rather it is the divine will that has power over all things. This relationship is a one-way relationship of God having power over the world.

The total depravity of humanity is the idea that “sinfulness pervades all areas of life or the totality of human existence.”⁵ This concept of theological anthropology, emphasized more heavily by the Reformed tradition than by most other Christian traditions, claims that humanity

³ W. David Buschart, *Exploring Protestant Traditions: An Invitation to Theological Hospitality* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 103.

⁴ Donald K. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 117.

⁵ McKim, *Dictionary*, 284.

(and by extension all of creation) is completely permeated by sin. The presence of sin fully corrupts humanity so that it is incapable of doing anything good in thought or action, except with God's help. On its own, this concept paints a very bleak picture of reality, but the total depravity of humanity is only one side of the coin, the fallen side of creation, which is complemented by God's sovereign providence.

God's providence is "God's continuing action by which all creation is preserved, supported, and governed by God's purposes and plans for human history and human lives."⁶ The doctrine of divine providence, one shared by a majority of Christian traditions to varying degrees, is the claim that God guides or controls the world. The continued and reliable existence of the world is attributed to God's actions. Every occurrence within history is considered to be part of God's ongoing plan for reality, since God is in charge and uses divine power to determine events accordingly.

And election is "God's choosing of a people to enjoy the benefits of salvation and to carry out God's purposes in the world."⁷ Election has a place of prominence in Reformed thought, where it can be understood that God makes a decree determining those individuals who will receive salvation, and in turn be empowered to overcome their total depravity in order to be a force for God's will in the world. The timing of this decree, and the possibility of a secondary decree electing some individuals towards damnation, varies among Reformed theologians. But these concepts (sovereignty, total depravity, providence, and election) are all interrelated and find a prominent place in the Reformed tradition as it is traditionally and historically understood. If these problematic doctrines are understood by their traditional definitions, then the Reformed

⁶ McKim, *Dictionary*, 226.

⁷ McKim, *Dictionary*, 88.

tradition seems to be no more than a reinforcement of the classical theism that uses substance metaphysics, and which process theology seeks to oppose and to transform.

As these concepts are traditionally understood, they do in fact help to support the construct of theology based on substance metaphysics and can be problematic in the world in which we live. The traditional Reformed understanding of God's sovereignty sees God as removed from the world and completely independent from it, neither reliant on anything in the world nor influenced by it in any way. This is clearly the opposite of process thought's understanding of the profound relational nature of reality. The total depravity of humanity, as seen in the classical Reformed understanding above, claims that humanity on its own is unable ever to do anything good, with a fallen state of existence severed from God. This doctrine reinforces the divide between God and humanity and limits human freedom, both of which are opposed by process thought. As often understood, divine providence requires that God determine events and actions within the world in accordance with God's will. Process thought conceives of God's power in very different ways from this version of divine power, as a power of influence rather than the power of control and determination seen here. Election also reinforces substantialist theology when understood as above, since it is a unilateral choice of God that determines not only states of salvation, but also actions within the world. As already seen in divine providence, this uses and reinforces the understanding of God's power from substance metaphysics, one that seems dissonant from how we actually experience reality.

The underlying substance metaphysics of classical theism, opposed by process thought, is clearly present in each of these traditional understandings of the central soteriological concepts of sovereignty, total depravity, providence, and election. But it is only through difference that true learning can take place. If process thought is only in dialogue with traditions in which it can

see itself as present, then it has no real growth or learning since what it finds is mostly a reflection of itself. When true difference is present between the dialogue partners, learning is possible for both. Of course, this still requires that within the difference there is some commonality between the traditions upon which dialogue can be built. In this case, it will be seen that there is a core of many Reformed doctrines that is far more parallel to process thought than originally appears, capable of entering dialogue with process theology and of being rescued from problematic substance metaphysics.

The substance metaphysics that Reformed theology has traditionally been built upon is growing increasingly unsuitable for the world in which we live. There are two primary factors that call for an inherently relational metaphysics: globalization and alienation. As communication and information technologies have become more and more advanced, the world in which each one of us lives has gotten ever larger through the inclusion of more people and places. It has reached a point of globalization, where it is readily apparent that one's web of relationships and influences stretches across the entire globe and can potentially impact any other person. It has become easy to see the direct influence that one's actions have on individuals around the world. Not only that, but it has become increasingly easier to be in immediate communication with anyone virtually anywhere on the planet, allowing for a sharing of information and experience between all people.

Yet at the same time, there appears to be a growing sense of alienation from the world, particularly felt in the context of the United States. The significant depression, violence, bigotry, drug use, and hollow materialism seen in the United States are all ways of dealing with a sense of alienation found all too often in the everyday lives of individuals. The causes of this profound sense of alienation are complex, debatable, and far beyond the scope of this work, but for our

purposes it is enough to consider and address the symptoms of alienation. Depression, while not only caused by alienation, can certainly be a response to alienation through the despair of feeling isolated, even in our globalized world. Violence and bigotry reflect a sense of alienation because they are both rooted in fear through their attempts to take control of one's alienating circumstances. Drug use and hollow materialism both are responses to alienation in that they offer an escape and a distraction from the profound dissatisfaction of feeling isolated, from the alienation-induced form of depression. These twin factors, globalization and a sense of alienation, demand a relational theology capable of explaining the intricate tangle of global relationships and of assuring us that we are not alone. Process thought provides the framework for such a theology.

The benefits of process thought for the Reformed tradition are thus made clear, but it must also be shown why Reformed theology is a beneficial dialogue partner for process theologians. The Reformed tradition emphasizes the sovereignty and otherness of God arguably more than any other Christian tradition. It is through this characteristic Reformed emphasis on the separation of God and the world that the cycle of soteriology becomes clearer. The distinction between the world and God as independent agents makes their significant actions on one another more obvious and easier to explore. While the actions of God and of creation are separate from one another, they are interrelated to one another through these significant actions. As Barth says, God “actually does not desire to be without humanity, but *with* us, and in the same freedom to be not against us but, regardless of and contrary to our desert, to be *for* us – he desires in fact to be humanity's partner.”⁸ God is for us, intimately connected to us. God and the

⁸ Karl Barth, “The Humanity of God,” trans. James Strathearn McNab, in *Karl Barth: Theologian of Freedom*, ed. Clifford Green (1989; repr., Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 56.

world remain distinct agents while being related through their actions, which are significant for one another.

Bringing the insights of these distinct moments of divine and worldly action to process thought, very similar moments can be seen in the process worldview, despite the fact that process theology emphasizes the interdependent relationship of God and the world rather than their distinct actions significant for one another found in Reformed theology. Even though they have very different starting points in the Reformed tradition's unique otherness of God and in process theology's interdependently related God-world, the same movements of God and the world can be seen in both of them. Only by dialogue with the Reformed tradition, with its characteristic distinction between God and the world, can the movements of God and the world within one another be seen so clearly. Although certainly not found as emphases in the mainstream traditions of process thought, there are minority elements within process philosophy that are highlighted by this dialogue. Chief among these is the uniqueness and otherness of God in process metaphysics, in which God is ontologically distinct from the rest of reality. Normally God's relational nature as part of the system is emphasized by process theologians, but there is a strong sense in which process theology's God is still fundamentally different from the rest of the system. This uniqueness of God, along with other often-neglected elements of process thought, are shown to process theologians through this dialogue, illustrating to them the resources within their own rich tradition. Reformed theology provides process thought with the clear distinction-in-unity of God and the world in order to highlight particular emphases of the God-world relationship to a greater extent than are otherwise seen in mainstream process theology.

Thus the questions must be asked: what do these Reformed concepts look like when seen through the lens of process thought? On what do these two theological traditions agree? Are they

saying similar things using different language? Where can they be drawn closer together? Where are there irreconcilable differences? The central hypothesis around which this dissertation is built is that by bringing the process thought exemplified by Alfred North Whitehead into dialogue with Reformed theology as seen in Karl Barth and Shirley Guthrie, the problematic Reformed soteriological concepts of divine sovereignty, total depravity, divine providence, and election can be understood in more adequate terms for the world in which we live through the lens of process thought's conceptions of novelty and divine natures, while also providing process thought with points of commonality and with unique emphases through dialogue with the Reformed tradition since they are both reflecting the same soteriological cycle of movements in the God-world relationship.

The resultant process-Reformed theology is a cycle of soteriology because the concepts being considered from both traditions parallel one another in their descriptions of a cycle of God-world interactivity. Although it is a cycle and thus ongoing and cyclical without any true starting point, both traditions can still be said to begin with abstract non-realized states. In the Reformed tradition this is the dual concepts of total depravity and divine sovereignty, while in process thought it is the primordial nature of God. Then they both describe the process of God entering into the world, found as divine providence in the Reformed tradition and as the lure toward novelty in process thought. They both describe the state of the unified God-world, either as Jesus Christ for the Reformed theologian or as novelty itself for the process thinker. Finally, both describe the influx of the world into God, conceptualized in the Reformed tradition as election and in process thought as the consequent nature of God. Using this cycle of the movements of the God-world relationship as a framework, it is possible to see Reformed theological concepts through a process lens.

In order to achieve this more adequate understanding of Reformed theological concepts, methodology must be considered. This project is a work of philosophical theology. The primary sources being used are the writings of philosophers and theologians, particularly ones authoritative for their fields. Although these theologians may frequently appeal to scripture, scripture itself is not a major source for this endeavor. Rather, Christian scripture is behind the scenes as a primary authoritative witness to the revelation of God to which this work should be held accountable. The other, perhaps more important, factor to which this argument must be held accountable is experience. Ultimately, all good theology must speak to and be reflective of what we experience of the divine within the world. If this theology, which is built on the comparisons and analyses of the works of other theologians, does not resonate with divinity and the world as experienced, then it has failed. This experience is not merely abstract experience, nor my own personal experience (although that obviously plays a large part in guiding my theology given that it constitutes my context), but rather attempts to be a category of experience that is inclusive of a wide diversity of concrete experiences and contexts, as seen through the diversity of sources and their accompanying experiences. As such, experience is the constant guide as particular problematic Reformed soteriological concepts are considered through the lens of process thought.

The most important terms that need careful definition in this project are the concepts being analyzed: divine sovereignty, total depravity, divine providence, and election. Preliminary and limited definitions of each of these have already been given above, based on their traditional understandings in the Reformed tradition. But these are not the only terms that must be carefully defined. Others within the thesis itself include: soteriological, concepts, adequate, novelty, divine

natures, unique emphases, and points of commonality. At the outset, these may be understood as follows.

The term ‘soteriological’ is understood as anything concerned with the “study of how salvation is accomplished.”⁹ Broadly speaking, this could encompass nearly all of traditional Christian theology. But here it is being used in a specific narrower sense to signify the specific actions of God and creation that are significant for one another in the process of the salvation of the created world. It should also be noted that the terms creation and world are here being used interchangeably to mean all of reality apart from God, with one term coming from the Reformed tradition, creation, and the other coming from process thought, the world.

‘Concepts’ are individual ideas within larger philosophical or theological systems. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari define a concept as “the inseparability of a finite number of heterogeneous components traversed by a point of absolute survey at infinite speed.”¹⁰ While it is used in a similar sense here, the roles of concepts as parts of a larger system are more heavily emphasized. Examples of concepts include particular Christian doctrines, like soteriology, Christology, eschatology, ecclesiology, etc. within the larger system of Christian theology, or of the dual natures of God, of novelty, or of concrescence within the larger system of process philosophy.

‘Adequate’ is a philosophical criteria seeking to show “that there are no items” in all of experience “incapable of such interpretation” by the resultant philosophy or theology.¹¹ Thus, adequacy for a system of thought is a requirement that any and every experience falls within the system and can be accounted for or explained by it. The adequacy of a theology or philosophy is

⁹ McKim, *Dictionary*, 247.

¹⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *What is Philosophy?* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 21.

¹¹ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 3.

the ultimate test of its applicability and usefulness in describing the actually experienced world in which we live.

‘Novelty,’ as seen in process thought, is any “actual occasion” that is “diverse from any entity in the ‘many’ in which it unifies.”¹² In the events of the world, the radically new enters into reality and allows the continuing advance of creativity to continue to create reality as we experience it. Without novelty, the world would be left in a static meaningless state. Through God’s actions a space for novelty is continually opened up in the events of the world.

‘Divine natures’ are process theology’s understanding of God’s two natures, described as the primordial nature of “the unlimited conceptual realization of the absolute wealth of potentiality”¹³ and the consequent nature of “the realization of the actual world in the unity of his nature.”¹⁴ The primordial nature of God presents its wealth of potentiality to the occasions of the world for use in their concrescences, luring them towards the best possibilities. The consequent nature of God transforms and unites the realized occasions of the world into the divine nature, evaluating and responding to them.

‘Unique emphases’ are the insights into process thought provided by the Reformed tradition, highlighting areas of process metaphysics often overlooked by the majority of process thinkers. Process theology has a wealth of resources within its own tradition, some of which are sparingly utilized or highlighted. Dialogue with the Reformed tradition highlights some of these neglected areas of process philosophy that have commonalities with Reformed theological concepts, areas such as the unique otherness of God.

And ‘points of commonality’ are concepts with very similar content. They are not points of identity, wherein the concepts are the same. But rather they are concepts that have both

¹² Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 21.

¹³ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 343.

¹⁴ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 345.

similarity and difference, with the similarity being emphasized but the difference also being recognized. They are similar concepts or doctrines, through which the two traditions can be in a transformative dialogue.

A final term needing careful definition is one that represents an underlying assumption of the thesis but does not appear within it: salvation. From process thought, salvation is understood by the fact that God “saves the world as it passes into the immediacy of his own life. It is the judgment of a tenderness which loses nothing that can be saved. It is also the judgment of a wisdom which uses what in the temporal world is mere wreckage.”¹⁵ Process salvation is God’s transformative harmonization of every element of the world into unity within God’s self. And for the Reformed tradition, salvation is achieved through “God’s declaring a sinful person to be ‘just’ on the basis of the righteousness of Jesus Christ,”¹⁶ or the transferring of God’s righteousness to humanity, uniting humanity to God’s goodness in order to restore humanity. Humanity is adopted by God through partaking in Jesus Christ’s unity with God. This is a similarity found in the two traditions, since they both understand salvation as God’s transformative unity with the world in order to reconcile the world to God, even if they articulate it in different ways using different philosophies.

The “original” state of reality that requires salvation must also be recognized as a related underlying assumption. Drawing on the definition of salvation, it can be seen that for process theology, this is the perpetual perishing of the past, where the occasions of the world will be left behind in triviality, denying the rightful role of all of reality to continue to be an influence on the future. For Reformed thought, humanity’s fallen state that needs the rescue of salvation is the state of “not believing in God, turning to our own resources,” which has “led to a corruption of

¹⁵ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 346.

¹⁶ McKim, *Dictionary*, 152.

our true relation to God and consequently a corruption of our true nature. This in turn is manifest in the multitude of ‘sins’ imaged as ‘lawbreaking.’ The fundamental need is for reconciliation to God – a renewal of our relationship with God – and forgiveness of sins (which were the consequences of our disorientation from God).”¹⁷ Or in other words, humanity has turned inward toward itself, denying its true nature as children of God existing to love one another. Although process thought focuses on the transformative rescue of all of reality from triviality while the Reformed tradition emphasizes restoring the original nature and role of humanity as God’s loving servants, it can be seen that both traditions similarly exhibit the core idea that God is transformatively resurrecting the world into unity with God’s self in order to restore the world to its rightful place in reality. When brought together, all of these terms that have been defined above come from a variety of sources reflecting the diverse audiences of the project.

The audience of this project is twofold. The first is that of Reformed theologians, mostly within the academy. In writing to a Reformed audience, important and authoritative theologians from the Reformed tradition are used as sources, having been opened up to greater possibilities through the use of process thought as a theological tool. The second audience is that of process theologians. The works of many significant process thinkers enter into the dialogue, with the Reformed tradition reflecting important commonalities and offering conceptual emphases for use by process thought that differ from what is emphasized by the majority of process thinkers. Although this work hopefully appeals to wider audiences of theologians in general, these are the two particular audiences to be kept in mind.

With these audiences, there are specific aims being pursued, each of which is accomplished by a specific objective. One aim is to show Reformed theologians the usefulness

¹⁷ Anna Case-Winters, “Salvation,” in *The Westminster Handbook to Reformed Theology*, ed Donald K. McKim (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 201.

of process thought as the philosophical lens of theology. This first aim is accomplished through the use of process thought in the construction of new understandings of divine sovereignty, total depravity, providence, election, and other doctrines that are still distinctly Reformed. In doing this, the usefulness of process thought as the metaphysical framework for Reformed theology will be illustrated.

A second aim, one directed at the process theologians, is to illustrate the potential fruitfulness of engaging the Reformed tradition in a deeper dialogue. This aim is accomplished through the analysis and comparison of the core of key soteriological concepts in both the Reformed and process traditions. Through this objective the fruitfulness of the Reformed tradition as a dialogue partner for process theologians will be shown by the emphases within the tradition of process thought that are uniquely highlighted by comparison with Reformed theology.

A third aim is to bring these two apparently dissonant traditions into a meaningful and genuine dialogue that authentically represents them both. The third aim is achieved throughout this endeavor by paying close attention to the sources as they are brought together. As long as the sources are understood properly and not twisted into misunderstandings, then a meaningful and authentic dialogue is occurring.

The final and most important aim is to arrive at an adequate process-Reformed soteriology. The objective that ensures the final central aim is the stated goal of the thesis and the culmination of the project: a more adequate understanding of the problematic Reformed soteriological concepts of divine sovereignty, total depravity, divine providence, and election through the lens of process thought's conceptions of novelty and divine natures. This process-Reformed soteriology is tentative and hypothetical as the divergent traditions are being brought

together. As such, there will certainly still be areas of dissonance between them, but overall this hypothesis of a constructive process-Reformed soteriology will have been confirmed by the end of the project.

The achievement of these objectives requires specific steps in the argument of this project. The first step is to introduce the problem being addressed, to define relevant key terms, to present the hypothesis being tested by this exploratory dissertation, and to discuss the methodology that will be followed (this step is accomplished by the Introduction). Next, the project must delve into the world of process thought in order to analyze and to present the most significant concepts for this dialogue: the dual natures of God, the lure towards novelty, and novelty itself. Once this has been accomplished, it is possible to explore the Reformed concepts that enter into the dialogue, seeking the core of what is intended in divine sovereignty, total depravity, divine providence, Christ, and election. After both of these realms of thought have been authentically presented and assessed, they can be brought together in a comparison and analysis that will illuminate the points of agreement, similarity, and difference of many of their concepts and illustrate the promise that process philosophy can offer to Reformed theology as an alternative to substance metaphysics that will make it more adequate for the world that we experience.

Chapter One delves into process thought. In this chapter, particular attention is given to the primordial and consequent natures of God, to the lure toward novelty, and to novelty itself. Each of these concepts is explored in turn, along with their relationships to one another. Particular emphasis is placed on the interactions between God and the world, and between the world and God, in each of these concepts. Special attention is paid here to Whitehead's writings, but many other process philosophers and theologians also enter into the discussion. The chapter

begins with a brief overview of process philosophy before delving into the specific concepts addressed, including the primordial nature of God, the lure toward novelty in the world and in God, the concept of novelty, the consequent nature of God, the inherent reciprocal nature between God and the world in the system of process thought, and the uniqueness of God.

Although the exploration of these concepts has a great deal of depth and nuance, generalized summaries of the major relevant concepts can hint at how they are addressed. The primordial nature of God is seen in part as an abstract incomplete God removed from the world, and paired with a world lacking all novelty as both being unrealized abstract states, seen in Whitehead's writing on the primordial nature that "the conceptual feelings, which compose his primordial nature, exemplify in their subjective forms their mutual sensitivity and their subjective unity of subjective aim. These subjective forms are valuations determining the relative relevance of eternal objects for each occasion of actuality,"¹⁸ and by John Cobb claiming of a lack of novelty that "to whatever extent events come into being simply in conformity to the pressures of the past, they are governed by entropy. There would, of course, be an order also in a universe in which entropy had run its full course, but it would be only a statistical order."¹⁹ The lure of novelty is the influx of God's will that brings about a flourishing reality, as shown in Cobb's statement that "what is wholly without character in itself has been primordially characterized by a decision that ordered what is possible for the sake of all creatures. Whitehead calls this character of creativity the Primordial Nature of God. There is no creativity not characterized by this Nature."²⁰ Novelty is understood as the emerging reality in which we live, about which Roland Faber writes that novelty is "the new as the *radically* new. Its radical nature

¹⁸ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 344.

¹⁹ John B. Cobb, Jr., *Christ in a Pluralistic Age* (1975; repr., Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), 75-76.

²⁰ John B. Cobb, Jr., *Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism* (1982; repr., Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016), 126.

appears precisely where its appearance is accompanied by the unexpected, the surprising (or even frightening) element of something otherwise inaccessible that can *in no way* be derived from the old.”²¹ And the consequent nature of God is the choice of God to bring all the events of the world into God’s self, and thus also the influx of the world into God, or as Whitehead writes as seen above, it “is his judgment on the world. He saves the world as it passes into the immediacy of his own life. It is the judgment of a tenderness which loses nothing that can be saved. It is also the judgment of a wisdom which uses what in the temporal world is mere wreckage.”²²

Chapter Two turns from process thought to the Reformed tradition, primarily using the writings of Barth and Guthrie, along with Calvin and some other Reformed theologians. The theological concepts that receive attention in this chapter are divine sovereignty, total depravity, divine providence, and election, with some time also spent reflecting on Christ. Each of these concepts are analyzed as stages in a soteriological cycle. Barth is the primary representative of the core of Reformed theology, with his thoughts having taken the core of Calvin and built on them. When it comes to actual dialogue with process thought, however, Barth is being read through the lens of Guthrie as the primary dialogue partner representing the Reformed tradition, having adapted Barth’s theology for a context closer to our postmodern world, just as Barth adapted Calvin in his time. When presenting each of these concepts, the theological core, i.e., what it has to say about God and God’s relationship to us, is sought above all else, at times indicating aspects that are extraneous and that may appear unnecessary or dissonant with experienced reality. After moving through an overview of the Reformed tradition, including Calvin, Barth, and Guthrie, the Reformed concepts of sovereignty, depravity, providence, Christ,

²¹ Roland Faber, *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies*, trans. Douglas W. Stott (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 82-83.

²² Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 346.

and election will be examined, culminating in an a glimpse at the Reformed core of each of these doctrines.

As with the analysis of the concepts of process thought, there is depth and nuance to the analysis of these terms, but in essence it is argued that the core of these theological concepts can be summarized as follows. Divine sovereignty is that abstract state in which God is free from the world but still chooses to love it, shown by Guthrie's claim that "the love of God is *sovereign* and *free* love, and the sovereign power of God is *loving* sovereignty and freedom."²³ The total depravity of creation, as seen by Guthrie stating that "nothing we do is free from the corruption of sinful self-interest,"²⁴ is the abstract state in which creation is only capable of turning away from God in all things. Divine providence is God making God's will manifest in the world; it is "the sovereign power of a God who is for and not against us, whose kingdom will come and whose will for our good will be done,"²⁵ according to Guthrie. Christ is the reality of God's full entry into the world that allows for salvation and for the existence of reality as we know it, reflected in Barth's words on the name of Jesus Christ when he writes that "He who bears this name is Himself the peace and salvation. The peace and salvation can be known, therefore, only in Him, and proclaimed only in His name."²⁶ And election is God's choosing to lift up creation, or portions of it, to receive the salvation of unity with God and to partake in God's plan in the world, partially seen by Guthrie as "God's plan to free us *from* slavery to all the internal and external, psychological and social powers that enslave and dehumanize us in order that we might

²³ Shirley C. Guthrie, Jr., *Christian Doctrine*, rev. ed. (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994), 103.

²⁴ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 225.

²⁵ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 111-112.

²⁶ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4 vols., ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrence, English trans (New York: T. & T. Clark, 1936-1969), VI/1, 21.

be genuinely free people – people who discover and fulfill their own true humanity as they freely love God and their fellow human beings.”²⁷

Chapter Three compares and further analyzes the key concepts that were discussed in the previous two chapters, forming the bulk of the actual argument. The hypothesis of this dissertation will be revisited: that a process-Reformed soteriology is possible and beneficial for both traditions. In support of this hypothesis it is then shown that each of these theologies is using different terminology for similar movements: an abstract non-actualized state, God’s movement into the world, the state of flourishing reality, and the world being brought into God. Abstract, non-actualized states are seen in both theologies, termed the world without novelty and the primordial nature of God in process thought, or the total depravity of humanity and divine sovereignty in Reformed theology. God’s movement into the world can be seen both through process’s lure toward novelty and through Reformed divine providence. The current state of reality’s flourishing, the merging of the God-world, is reflected by both novelty and Christ, respectively, in process and Reformed theologies. And God’s bringing of the world into God’s self is understood as the consequent nature of God in process theology and as election in the Reformed tradition.

In addition to these specific concepts, attention is given to the movements themselves and a summary of the cycle of soteriology visible in both systems. It is argued that at their core they are reflecting the same soteriological cycle of interaction between God and the world. Keeping the core of these Reformed concepts, which is the soteriological cycle itself, it is argued that a more adequate theological understanding can be achieved if the matching process philosophy is used to explain the theology, rather than using the substance metaphysics of classical theism. Thus, theological concepts from traditional Reformed theology are rescued from the philosophy

²⁷ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 133.

that in part robs them of their effectiveness and applicability, and instead are applied using process thought in new and helpful ways.

Chapter Four is devoted to the remaining dissonances and divergences between process thought and Reformed theology, and to the potential objections to this argument and responses to these possible objections. The primary portion of this chapter deals with the concepts that do not agree with the hypothesis that a process-Reformed soteriology is possible and beneficial, including the most important divergent areas that must remain in difference: the bottom-up process system as opposed to the top-down Reformed theology, the different levels of God's independence and superiority over the world encountered in the two systems, and the related concepts of God's power over the world also being at different levels, which is connected to issues of eschatological hope.

The second part of this chapter is devoted to objections that may be raised by one or the other of the intended audiences. The audience of process theologians may raise objections concerning the resultant theology as not being mutual enough, with God having too much power and the world seeming to have too little freedom. Another objection from the context of process thought may be that the results are too exclusively Christian. Both of these objections, however, are answered. On the other hand, the Reformed audience may also raise several objections that must be addressed. God may be seen as being too influenced by creation, or that God's will is no longer absolute. And humanity may be seen as being allowed too much freedom and power when compared to God. These, too, are answered in Chapter Four. Ultimately, although there are found to be a handful of true differences remaining, most of these apparent differences are seen to be points of similarity wherein the aspects where they differ are being emphasized more than their core commonality.

In the Conclusion of the dissertation, the hypothetical thesis is restated and the argument of the dissertation concisely summarized in order to show that the thesis has been confirmed. Going beyond that, the benefits of the resultant process-Reformed theology are illustrated, and potential avenues for further development are briefly explored. The benefits are shown primarily by comparing the God-world relationship that has been arrived at with the God-world relationship that was started from in Reformed theology. It is seen not only that the resultant relationship is more true to experience, but also that it results in a God who is more worthy of our worship. The benefits to the process audience are less obvious and less easy to illustrate, but it is briefly shown how using the theological and religious terms of the Reformed tradition, rather than the more complicated (albeit more precise) philosophical language of process thought, may help to broaden the understanding and acceptance of process theology. It is also seen that dialogue with the Reformed tradition can offer new theological emphases in process thought, unique from those highlighted by dialogue with other traditions. In exploring areas for further development, a few major loci of Reformed systematic theology are examined very briefly to illustrate how they may also benefit from a similar dialogue with process thought.

The flow of the argument of the paper is thus as follows. This Introduction presents the problem and the hypothesis being explored, along with other preliminary matters. Chapter One examines and analyzes the relevant concepts of process thought. Chapter Two seeks the core of the Reformed theological doctrines that enter into the dialogue. Chapter Three appropriately and authentically pairs together the concepts analyzed in the two previous chapters in order to bring them into a fruitful dialogue and to arrive at new understandings of the Reformed concepts. Chapter Four addresses the remaining points of dissonance where the two traditions remain incompatible, in addition to dealing with several possible objections to the project and providing

corresponding responses. Finally, the Conclusion returns to the hypothesis, showing how it has been confirmed, while also illustrating the benefits that have been arrived at and suggesting potential avenues of further research. In this way, the previously discussed objectives and aims of the project are achieved.

Ultimately, what is seen through this argument is a collaboration of Reformed and process thought, specifically the collaboration of Guthrie's adaptation of Barth on the one hand and the process thought of Whitehead and his interpreters on the other. It is only a collaboration because the dialogue allows both traditions to see their points of agreement and similarity, where they can incorporate insights from one another. Collaboration is the best term for this dialogue because, despite their differences, the two traditions will be collaborating (literally, working together) towards a process-Reformed soteriology. The collaboration results only in a partial integration and avoids a full synthesis because there are points that remain irreconcilably different. Of the major theological elements encountered in this work, there are found to be three points of agreement, six of similarity, and three of difference. The three major theological doctrines on which the Reformed and process traditions find agreement are the uniqueness of God, the person and work of Christ, and what salvation entails. For both of them, God is distinct from the rest of reality. They both see Christ as revealing God and saving humanity, particularly in Jesus of Nazareth. And for both theologies salvation can be found in unity with God.

Before moving on to the doctrines of similarity, it is necessary to state clearly what similarity means. In order for this category to apply to a doctrine, the two traditions must have a common core idea to which they are both appealing. Despite this common core, there must also be a real difference in how the core is articulated in the language of the two theologies. But the difference between them cannot overtake what they have in common, for then it would be

dissimilarity rather than similarity. Process thought and the Reformed tradition exhibit similarity in their doctrines of providence, election, depravity, mutuality, divine power, and in their methodologies. In divine providence, they are in agreement that God guides and accompanies the world, but differ on the mode of God's guiding power. Both agree that God presents the gift of God and the world to the world, but they differ on whether this is necessary or voluntary. Process and Reformed theologies both express the core idea that we are reliant on God for our salvation and continued existence, although they differ on why we must rely on God. The mutuality of God and the world is seen in both theologies because for both God is influenced by the world even as God influences the world, yet they differ in whether or not the world's influence on God is necessary or voluntary. Both traditions also have a kenotic view of Christ as being the key to revealing God and how God's power operates in the world, but once again they differ on whether it is a necessary or voluntary kenosis. Lastly, both theologies have the same core methodology of seeking to interpret the revelation of God, particularly as it is seen in scripture, but they differ in their chosen interpretive philosophies.

Even though there are so many key points of agreement and similarity, it is important also to recognize those areas in which process and Reformed theologians will forever remain in disagreement. The three areas seen in this work where there is irreconcilable difference are in God's sovereignty, in their doctrine of eschatology, and in their approaches to interreligious dialogue. When it comes to the sovereignty of God, process thought sees God's sovereignty as a lack that requires the world. Meanwhile, the Reformed tradition sees God as a perfect entity in God's own self apart from the world. The doctrine of eschatology finds very different representations in process and Reformed theologies, with process thought understanding an ongoing and constant eschatology in every moment, while for the Reformed tradition

eschatology emphasizes an end-time event. And in their interreligious approaches, process theology encourages a deep pluralism, while at their best and most open Reformed theologians only advocate for a form of inclusivism. Despite these real differences, the greater points of agreement and similarity show that there are important points of commonality between these two traditions, such that both process and Reformed theologians would benefit from greater dialogue as they learn from one another and are mutually transformed.

Just as there are two primary audiences for this project, there are two academic contexts into which the project is entering. In the context of process thought, this work is among the few engaged in direct dialogue with the Reformed tradition, the most significant ones being the works of Anna Case-Winters and Donna Bowman. But in a wider context, this dissertation joins the many process theologians who actively seek to find fruitful theological ground for process thought within other theological traditions, including Cobb, Masao Abe, Marjorie Suchocki, Monica Coleman, and Joseph Bracken, among many others. Like their works, this project seeks to bring about a productive marriage between the insights of process philosophy and the theological language and concepts of a particular religious tradition. The major work used as the chief example and primary representative of process thought is *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* by Whitehead. Of course, this single work is not the only representation of process though since it is also joined by the efforts of many other process thinkers, including Abe, Bracken, Cobb, Faber, Lewis Ford, David Ray Griffin, Charles Harthorne, Christopher Ives, Catherine Keller, and Suchocki. These are not the only process theologians who are referenced, but they are the major ones.

In the context of the Reformed tradition, this dissertation is joining the dialogue with process thought championed by Case-Winters and Bowman. But beyond that, this project is an

embodiment of the unofficial Reformed motto of *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*, meaning ‘the Reformed church always being reformed.’ Seeking the most adequate and most appropriate philosophy for use in theology is exactly part of what is suggested by that phrase. It is apparent that a philosophical shift is necessary because many Reformed theologians and lay people continue to have trouble aligning major theological concepts with the increasingly diverse world in which we live, such as the group that Guthrie calls reductionists, those “who seek to make the Christian faith relevant by placing it in service of what they believe are the best (or at least the most prevalent) values and goals of the society in which they live.”²⁸ This dissertation helps to continue that philosophical shift while maintaining a core theology that is uniquely Reformed. The primary exemplar of Reformed theology is Barth, both in his *Church Dogmatics* and in many of his other works, especially as he is interpreted by Guthrie. The works of other Reformed theologians are also significant dialogue partners, including but not limited to works written by the following theologians: Calvin, Emil Brunner, Horton Davies, David Gibson, David Buschart, Donald McKim, Bowman, and Case-Winters.

Keeping in mind the larger contexts into which this project enters, it is important to set up explicit constraints. At its heart, this dissertation is the pursuit of a hypothesis regarding the redefinition of specific theological terms coming out of the Reformed tradition through the lens of process thought. These terms are soteriologically related, but taken together they result in a very limited soteriology. Just as this project is not a full soteriology, neither is it a Christology, although Christ is included in the considerations. Rather, the dialogue and redefinitions presented are some initial efforts at a greater systematic exploration of the dialogue between process thought and the Reformed tradition. As this greater exploration is far beyond the scope of such a

²⁸ Shirley C. Guthrie, Jr., *Always Being Reformed: Faith for a Fragmented World*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 4.

project, what is presented as a cycle of soteriology is only able to hint at the wider scope that may one day be possible. One further constraint that the author and readers all must keep in mind is that this dissertation is being written from a Christian perspective, especially considering the dialogue partner of the Reformed tradition, but the dialogue and its results are wider than any one tradition can claim to possess as they speak to movements of the divine and the world within one another.

There are several possible preliminary objections to this project. Most fundamentally, there is a possible objection over the choice of process thought and the Reformed tradition as dialogue partners. From the process perspective, the Reformed tradition seems like an odd choice for a dialogue partner, even among Christian traditions. Surely there are other traditions that could have more fruitful dialogue with process thought, as has been seen by the work of theologians representing other diverse traditions. In fact, the Reformed tradition seems to represent the substance-based theology that process thought seeks to oppose and to transform. But that is precisely why the Reformed tradition could be such a valuable dialogue partner for process thought. If process thought is able to transform Reformed theology, to make the Reformed church truly exhibit its concept of *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*, then it is shown that process thought can transform even its largest theological obstacles and can be appropriate for any context. Not only does this dialogue offer the possibility of the transformation of a traditional opponent of process thought, but it also hints at the possibility of highlighting new emphases within process theology as the unique foci of the Reformed tradition bring out some shifts within process thought as well.

An objection from a Reformed perspective is that process thought also seems like a strange choice of dialogue partner, and for many of the same reasons. The two appear to be so

dissimilar at first glance that perhaps a different underlying metaphysics would be more appropriate for Reformed theology. But process philosophy is the most adequate philosophy available, capable of speaking to reality with more depth, clarity, and truth than can be found in any others. Reformed theology needs to allow itself to be guided by process thought as far as it can in order to stay relevant to our experiences in an increasingly globalized world.

A possible objection from both audiences is that the final resultant process-Reformed soteriology defines key concepts in ways that are disagreeable with either the process or the Reformed contexts. Many in the Reformed tradition, or in process thought, may find the process-Reformed definition of doctrines and concepts to be too different from their own understandings of them. This is a very real danger. In response, it must be remembered that part of this dialogue, and any authentic dialogue, is a mutual transformation through which both original contexts are challenged, enabling them to grow and to learn. As a consequence of moving out of the comfort zones of the original contexts of the dialogue partners, it is inevitable that there will be some Reformed and process theologians who will disagree with the outcome. That cannot be avoided. But for those with an open mind and a willingness to learn from others who are different, this dissertation endeavors to provide some tentative first steps into a process-Reformed soteriology.

A final preliminary objection to this dissertation that is considered here is the scope of the project. On the one hand the project may appear to be too small since the resulting theology is merely a limited soteriology, but on the other hand it may appear to be too large since it is a reconsideration of several major theological topics: sovereignty, total depravity, providence, and election. But it is through focusing on each of these concepts' soteriological and God-world aspects that a limited soteriology is created, thereby finding a middle ground between an expansive scope of completely redefining several major doctrines and the limited scope of only

redefining particular aspects of the single doctrine of soteriology. A soteriology is thus built from the ground up, using these linked concepts, rather than a top-down soteriology that considers everything traditionally thought of as soteriological, and only in this sense is the soteriology limited.

By bringing the process thought exemplified by Alfred North Whitehead into dialogue with Reformed theology as seen in Karl Barth and Shirley Guthrie, the problematic Reformed soteriological concepts of divine sovereignty, total depravity, divine providence, and election can be understood in more adequate terms for the world in which we live through the lens of process thought's conceptions of novelty and divine natures, while also providing process thought with points of commonality and with unique emphases through dialogue with the Reformed tradition since they are both reflecting the same soteriological cycle of movements in the God-world relationship. This hypothesis is confirmed through the careful analysis and comparison of relevant concepts within process thought and Reformed theology, always looking back to experienced reality as the test of the adequacy of any theology. First, the movements of process thought are explored. Second, the concepts of the Reformed tradition are considered, seeking the core of each theological doctrine without its accompanying philosophy of substance metaphysics. Then, the two traditions enter into a fruitful dialogue wherein a similar cycle in the God-world relationship is seen and process thought can be used to explain more adequately what is meant by each of the Reformed theological concepts. In this comparison and collaboration, it is seen that in the major theological elements explored there are three points of agreement, six of similarity, and three of difference to be found between the two traditions. Finally, new possibilities of dialogue are suggested, as this tentative and explorative project only hints at the potential growth of a process-Reformed theology.

Chapter One

Interrelated, Ongoing, and Unique: The Cycle of Soteriology in Process Theology

In order to have an understanding of soteriology in the context of process thought, it is necessary to analyze and explore the component concepts that constitute process theology's cycle of soteriology, the movements by which God saves the world. Over the course of this examination of key elements of process philosophy, several process theologians will weigh in with their understandings of God's primordial nature, of the lure toward novelty, of sin, of novelty itself, of Christ, of God's consequent nature, of the reciprocity between God and the world, and of the ontological uniqueness of God. By delving into these concepts of process thought, the process view of the cycle of soteriology will be seen clearly. God's salvific actions towards the world, and the world's salvific actions towards God, will be shown to be an interrelated and ongoing cycle, even though God has a unique place within that cycle.

With any exploration of process thought, Alfred North Whitehead is the central figure who must receive significant attention. While not a foundational figure, since process thought is inherently suspicious of foundational language, Whitehead is central because it is from his thoughts that other process theologians have taken their inspiration and organically grown the tradition. His major works on philosophy, which will be used here, are *Process and Reality* and *Adventures of Ideas*. Although some aspects of Whitehead's writings are now rather dated, particularly when it comes to his use of gender for God (as can be seen in quotations from his writings), he is still the gold standard to whom process thinkers refer. Whitehead's general philosophy has been further developed and refined by generations of process thinkers, some of the most notable being Charles Hartshorne, David Ray Griffin, John Cobb, Lewis Ford, Joseph

Bracken, Marjorie Suchocki, Catherine Keller, and Roland Faber. These thinkers will also enter into the discussion to provide a more complete view of process thought.

A very brief overview of the starting point and methodology of process thought is necessary before moving on to the rest of the process concepts that will be analyzed. In *Process and Reality*, Whitehead addresses the epistemological foundation of process thought by agreeing with the history of philosophy “that all knowledge was grounded on perception.”²⁹ Every experience is available as the foundation of knowledge, and apart from experiences as perceived in other experiences there is no knowledge. The philosophy that he seeks to build upon this epistemological foundation “is the endeavour to frame a coherent, logical, necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted.”³⁰ As such, everything will be included in this philosophical system, since “everything of which we are conscious, as enjoyed, perceived, willed, or thought, shall have the character of a particular instance of the general scheme.”³¹ Whitehead claims that such a philosophical system “should be ‘necessary,’ in the sense of bearing in itself its own warrant of universality throughout all experience, provided that we confine ourselves to that which communicates with immediate matter of fact.”³² He describes the foundation and methodology as follows: “the true method of discovery is like the flight of an aeroplane. It starts from the ground of particular observation; it makes a flight in the thin air of imaginative generalization; and it again lands for renewed observation rendered acute by rational interpretation.”³³ Process philosophy thus starts with particular experience, moves into generalizations based on that experience, and then returns to particular experiences in order to refine and confirm the generalizations posited. In the end, this

²⁹ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 158.

³⁰ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 3.

³¹ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 3.

³² Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 4.

³³ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 5.

philosophical cycle seeks to account for every possible experience. The stages of the cycle of soteriology explored throughout this chapter are built on this foundation and methodology.

The first element of the cycle of soteriology to be explored in these process thinkers' writings is the primordial nature of God. Although this stage will be treated first, it should be noted that since the cycle of soteriology is ongoing and repetitive there is no true beginning or ending. Rather, we are starting with the primordial nature of God for ease of understanding. The primordial nature is the vessel of the potential future of the world. The primordial nature of God is abstract before the world, but orders this abstract potentiality for the world's use. Every occasion, every moment, is provided its ordered possible future from the primordial nature of God. The primordial nature is God's abstract nonactual self, removed from the world even while guiding it towards particular possibilities.

Whitehead addresses the primordial nature in *Process and Reality*, where he calls it "the unconditioned conceptual valuation of the entire multiplicity of eternal objects,"³⁴ which "can be described only in terms of its potentiality for 'ingression' into the becoming of actual entities; and that its analysis only discloses other eternal objects. It is a pure potential."³⁵ The primordial nature is "the unlimited conceptual realization of the absolute wealth of potentiality."³⁶ In Whitehead's cosmological system in this text, he sees the primordial nature as the wealth of possibilities for reality, ordered and valuated. He writes that "the conceptual feelings, which compose his primordial nature, exemplify in their subjective forms their mutual sensitivity and their subjective unity of subjective aim," and that "these subjective forms are valuations determining the relative relevance of eternal objects for each occasion of actuality."³⁷ The

³⁴ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 31.

³⁵ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 23.

³⁶ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 343.

³⁷ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 344.

primordial nature is an agent of creativity in its determining the relevance of the potentiality that is the eternal objects for each occasion, in its providing an opening for novelty in every moment.

In *Adventures of Ideas*, the concept that Whitehead calls the primordial nature of God in *Process and Reality* is instead related to the term Eros, borrowed from Plato. He writes that “the initial phase of each fresh occasion represents the issue of a struggle within the past for objective existence beyond itself,” and that “the determinant of the struggle is the supreme Eros incarnating itself as the first phase of the individual subjective aim in the new process of actuality.”³⁸ Eros is the movement by which new occasions can arise in the first place, the force that begins the subjective aim by opening up possibilities from the past. He also claims of Eros that “the mental pole has derived its objective content alike by abstraction from the physical pole and by the immanence of the basic Eros which endows with agency all ideal possibilities,”³⁹ and which is “the urge towards the realization of ideal perception,” without which “we should obtain a static world.”⁴⁰ In this text, Whitehead is saying that Eros, the primordial nature of God in other texts, can be understood as the impetus that drives movement from the physical pole of the static past to the emergence of novelty by being the embodiment of ideal possibilities, which it presents to each occasion.

Cobb, as the foremost interpreter of Whitehead in our time, is in general agreement with him as he expands on his ideas. Cobb claims in *Christ in a Pluralistic Age* that the primordial nature of God is the ground of reality, which he calls the Logos. He writes of the Logos that it “is the cosmic principle of order, the ground of meaning, and the source of purpose,” and that Whitehead had many terms for this “transcendent source of the aim at the new,” including “the principle of concretion, the principle of limitation, the organ of novelty, the lure for feeling, the

³⁸ Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (1933; repr., New York: The Free Press, 1967), 198.

³⁹ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 210.

⁴⁰ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 275.

eternal urge of desire, the divine Eros, and God in his Primordial Nature.”⁴¹ In *Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism*, Cobb sees the primordial nature as the source of God’s creative, redemptive, sanctifying power, saying that the primordial nature is “the primordial decision for the sake of all creatures,”⁴² and claiming that it “provides both the novel order and the ordered novelty, which move the world toward more complex and richer patterns. As we analyze how this works in theological language, we can speak of creation, redemption, and sanctification as human beings open themselves to the lure of God and allow it to work within them.”⁴³ Later, in *Jesus’ Abba: The God Who Has Not Failed*, Cobb writes that through the primordial nature, God (or Abba as he refers to God in this text) is present in every moment, stating that “Abba has a role in each act. Abba offers to the experiencing occasion the possibility that will achieve the greatest value in that particular occasion.”⁴⁴ The power that God has in each occasion is best understood, according to Cobb, neither as coercive nor persuasive, since he suggests “that we speak of empowering power and liberating power” instead.⁴⁵ Overall, Cobb can be understood as seeing the primordial nature of God as the ordered potentiality of the universe and source of novelty that provides a call forward luring every act to its best possibilities.

Bracken, in *The One in the Many: A Contemporary Reconstruction of the God-World Relationship*, writes that the primordial nature is best understood as “the ordered relevance of all *eternal objects* to one another as grasped by God (in this book, the three divine persons) in a comprehensive vision and progressively employed by God (the divine persons) in guiding the

⁴¹ Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, 71.

⁴² Cobb, *Beyond Dialogue*, 131.

⁴³ John B. Cobb, Jr., “The Relativization of the Trinity,” in *Trinity in Process: A Relational Theology of God*, ed. Joseph A. Bracken and Marjorie Suchocki (New York: Continuum, 1997), 14.

⁴⁴ John B. Cobb, Jr., *Jesus’ Abba: The God Who Has Not Failed* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 107.

⁴⁵ Cobb, *Jesus’ Abba*, 138.

world of creation in its ongoing development.”⁴⁶ He agrees with Whitehead, but makes God an explicitly Trinitarian society of three persons. Despite this modification to the process understanding of God, Bracken affirms with Whitehead that through the primordial nature, “in one comprehensive valuation God brings order and coherence out of the vast plurality of eternal objects or patterns of intelligibility pertinent to the world of creation.”⁴⁷ In attempting to merge process thought with Trinitarian theology, Bracken claims that “all three divine persons participate in the divine primordial nature, the divine consequent nature, and the superjective nature of God, albeit in different ways,” with this difference meaning for the primordial nature that “while all three persons survey the vast realm of possibilities existent within their common field of activity at any given moment, the ‘Father’ alone ‘decides’ which possibility is appropriate for that moment of their common history.”⁴⁸ Careful to avoid a modalist understanding of the Trinity, Bracken avoids complete identification of the primordial nature with any divine person, while also acknowledging the special relevance of the ‘Father’ for the primordial nature. Thus, Bracken is writing that the primordial nature is the unified vision of potentiality used by God to lure the world into its own development for its own betterment, and that it is particularly associated with the ‘Father.’

Suchocki, in *God, Christ, Church: A Practical Guide to Process Theology*, identifies the primordial nature of God as “the basis of unity,”⁴⁹ and as “God’s knowledge of possibility.”⁵⁰ In doing this, she is emphasizing the primordial nature as God’s unifying knowledge. For her, the primordial nature, or God’s unifying knowledge, primarily is seen as “the conceptual vision of

⁴⁶ Joseph A. Bracken, *The One in the Many: A Contemporary Reconstruction of the God-World Relationship* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2001), 220.

⁴⁷ Bracken, *One in the Many*, 95.

⁴⁸ Joseph A. Bracken, “Panentheism from a Process Perspective,” in Bracken and Suchocki, 101.

⁴⁹ Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church: A Practical Guide to Process Theology*, rev. ed. (1989; repr., New York: Crossroad, 2013), 205.

⁵⁰ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 67.

all possibilities whatsoever, harmonized in the very process of being known.”⁵¹ God’s unifying knowledge is thus the ordered harmony of all potentiality. Suchocki writes that in the primordial nature of God, “God’s knowledge of possibilities is God’s valuation of possibilities, ranking them into harmonies of order, beauty, and goodness,” and that “in this knowing valuation, God unifies all possibilities – *all* possibilities.”⁵² She is further emphasizing the unifying aspect of the primordial nature of God as it presents all potentiality to every moment. For Suchocki, the primordial nature is represented by God’s unifying knowledge of possibility, wherein God knows, values, and harmonizes all possibilities.

In *Trinity in Process: A Relational Theology of God*, edited by Bracken and Suchocki, the contributors explore the primordial nature of God, among several other topics. Griffin terms the primordial nature of God the Creative Love of God, writing that “God’s eternal purpose to evoke creatures with the richest possible form of experience into being characterizes the Divine Creativity as Creative Love. This side of God’s nature includes the primordial potentials for the universe,” which “are envisaged with appetite for their actualization; this Creative Love is the divine eros, which initiates all motion.”⁵³ Through God’s Creative Love, Griffin sees God as the initiator of the process of each actual occasion. Philip Clayton writes of God being the infinite creative ground of the universe (while also being the highest personal being), stating that God “grounds the many and makes them one; through it the many become one. It is what makes the universe a *universe* not a multiverse.”⁵⁴ For Clayton, God can be seen as the infinite creative ground, meaning that God holds the universe together as one (often seen as a function of the consequent nature), and also is the source of all creativity in the universe (often seen as a

⁵¹ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 66.

⁵² Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 66.

⁵³ David Ray Griffin, “A Naturalistic Trinity,” in Bracken and Suchocki, 35.

⁵⁴ Philip Clayton, “Pluralism, Idealism, Romanticism: Untapped Resources for a Trinity in Process,” in Bracken and Suchocki, 132.

function of the primordial nature). In this text, Faber addresses the role of the primordial nature of God by writing that “the subjectivity of each creature is, thus, grounded in the nature of God,” since “the immediacy of irreducible subjects is grounded in the divine giving of a subjective aim, from which the otherwise *underivable* subjectivity ‘derives.’”⁵⁵ Even the very subjectivity of a concurring occasion is thus traced back to the aim provided by the primordial nature of God.

Also of concern in *Trinity in Process* is how the traditional Christian Trinitarian God can be mapped onto the process worldview. Suchocki points out one possibility for mapping at least two of the divine Trinity onto the primordial nature, writing that while “an analogous Whiteheadian formulation would call for the amorphous realm of possibilities called the primordial nature (or mental pole) of God to be likened to the traditional ‘Father,’ eternally generating from these possibilities the divine character in the primordial vision (or dynamically everlasting satisfaction of God),” yet it can also be claimed that “this vision is analogous to the divine self-knowledge traditionally attributed to the immanent ‘Son.’”⁵⁶ Ford brings Trinitarian theology into the structure of God, writing that “the trinity I propose is a single subjectivity as one actuality with three formally distinct natures, Father, Logos, and Spirit. As the totality of the divine possibilities, the Logos may be interpreted as corresponding to the primordial nature of God.”⁵⁷ For Ford, then, the primordial nature of God can be identified as the Logos. Bernard J. Lee proposes a different person of the Trinity to map onto the primordial nature, understanding the primordial nature as the location where “unrealized possibilities must be, as it were, waiting somewhere in the wings for their ingression into the actual world,”⁵⁸ and through which “every entity receives from God an ‘initial aim’ for its becoming (something partly analogous with the

⁵⁵ Roland Faber, “Trinity, Analogy, and Coherence,” in Bracken and Suchocki, 158.

⁵⁶ Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, “Spirit in and through the World,” in Bracken and Suchocki, 185.

⁵⁷ Lewis S. Ford, “Contingent Trinitarianism,” in Bracken and Suchocki, 44.

⁵⁸ Bernard J. Lee, “An ‘Other’ Trinity,” in Bracken and Suchocki, 201.

traditional ‘will of God’).”⁵⁹ Lee considers this function of God to be similar to that traditionally played by the Spirit, understood by him as Ruach, claiming that “God’s gift as primordial is a structured urge, a lure of feeling, and that this function of God has something significant in common with God’s efficacy as Ruach.”⁶⁰ This only scratches the surface of the differing proposals for understanding the Trinity through process theology, but serves to illustrate the different ways in which the primordial nature of God can be interpreted. Together, the contributors to *Trinity in Process* see the primordial nature of God as the source of creativity, potentiality, and subjectivity in the world, although they disagree on which person of the Trinity, if any, should have a particularly strong association with the primordial nature.

In *On the Mystery: Discerning Divinity in Process*, Keller addresses creation, which is related to the primordial nature of God. She summarizes her understanding of creation, *creatio ex profundis*, by writing that it is “genesis from the relational *complexity, the bottomless and irreducible past influence, the fluency of the very waters of creation*, in our con/fusing historical lives.”⁶¹ In this, she is claiming that creation arises from the web of interrelationships between occasions, including ourselves and God. She sees creation as a collective effort, “a complex interactive process is called forth: we may call it the *genesis collective*,” in which “the gathering cooperation unfolds as a rhythm, a cosmic liturgy: divine lure, creaturely improvisation, and divine reception – ooh, good!”⁶² Although Keller clearly emphasizes the cooperative and collective origins of reality, there is still a special place for God’s actions, which she shows when writing on the divine lure that “the content of the initial aim is precisely the *possible*. It is the possibility of something that would remain impossible apart from the amorous gift of the

⁵⁹ Lee, 202.

⁶⁰ Lee, 206.

⁶¹ Catherine Keller, *On the Mystery: Discerning Divinity in Process* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 106.

⁶² Keller, *On the Mystery*, 62.

possible itself. A possibility that we are being invited to actualize – or in more theological language, to embody in our carnal reality, to make flesh – to incarnate.”⁶³ The interrelated web of creation from which all of reality springs requires both God and the world, with God providing possibilities for the world to incarnate. She thus sees the primordial nature as the future possibilities for the world that are provided to the world by God for the world to incarnate.

Through these theologians’ writings, a clear conception of the primordial nature of God comes into focus. Process theology sees the primordial nature as the ordered potentiality of the universe, through which novelty can arise in every occasion. This can be seen in the individual process thinkers’ writings. Whitehead, in *Process and Reality*, sees the primordial nature as an agent of creativity in its determining the relevance of the eternal objects for each occasion, in its providing an opening for novelty in every moment. In *Adventures of Ideas*, Whitehead identifies the primordial nature as Eros, claiming that it is the impetus that drives movement from the physical pole of the static past to the emergence of novelty by presenting the embodiment of ideal possibilities to each occasion. Cobb claims it is the source of novelty, where all potentiality is ordered by God and presented to each occasion. For Bracken it is the valuation and harmonization of all the eternal objects within the Triune God as presented to actual occasions to lure them toward God’s vision for themselves and their societies. Suchocki sees it as represented by God’s unifying knowledge of possibility, wherein God knows, values, and harmonizes all possibilities. In *Trinity in Process*, the contributors agree that the primordial nature of God is the source of novelty and subjectivity in the world, but they disagree on how to connect the primordial nature to traditional Trinitarian theology. And Keller’s exploration of creation treats the primordial nature as the possible future, which the world can then embody. These are not identical understandings of the primordial nature of God, since each author has her or his own

⁶³ Keller, *On the Mystery*, 103.

focus and emphases. But throughout all of them, the primordial nature is conceived of as the realm of possibility, ordered for every occasion to present it with a relevant initial aim in order to lure each occasion into the best possible future for itself, God, and all of reality.

One of the primary functions of the primordial nature of God, as has already been alluded to, is to serve as the lure toward novelty. This lure is the action by which creativity continually advances in the world. The primordial nature of God, the infinite realm of possibility, provides each moment of reality with the possibilities for its future. It orders the pure potentiality of the eternal objects in order to present each occasion with the best relevant possibilities. By providing each moment with its possible futures, the world is lured toward these potentialities. The world is still free to choose among the presented possibilities, or a static reenactment of the past. The lure toward novelty that God's primordial nature presents toward the world has been a fundamental aspect of process thought since its beginnings in Whitehead.

Whitehead writes in *Process and Reality* that the lure toward novelty comes from the primordial nature, claiming that the primordial nature "is the lure for feeling, the eternal urge of desire," and that God's "particular relevance to each creative act, as it arises from its own conditioned standpoint in the world, constitutes him the initial 'object of desire' establishing the initial phase of each subjective aim."⁶⁴ Thus, in this text Whitehead is explicitly claiming that the primordial nature is the source of novelty in the world, as it is the vessel of all potentialities, providing the initial aim as a lure in every moment of concrescence. And in *Adventures of Ideas*, Whitehead connects this aspect of the primordial nature to the term "conceptual valuations,"⁶⁵ which is related to the eternal objects. On writing of "the process which constitutes the existence of an occasion of experience," he claims that "the process is urged onward by operation of the

⁶⁴ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 344.

⁶⁵ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 281.

mental pole providing conceptual subject-matter for synthesis with the Reality,” and that “there finally emerges the Appearance, which is the transformed Reality after synthesis with the conceptual valuations.”⁶⁶ These conceptual valuations that allow the continuation of reality are initially from the Eros, otherwise termed the primordial nature in other texts. Overall, Whitehead views the lure toward novelty to be the primordial nature of God as presented to each occasion in the world, forming the initial desire that opens up the possibility of novelty in every moment.

Ford has given significant attention to the divine lure toward novelty. In *The Lure of God: A Biblical Background for Process Theism*, he considers the kind of providence that results from the divine lure, writing that “from the standpoint of divine persuasion, providence is simply another way of looking at God’s guidance of the historical process already manifest in creation. Classical omnipotence, however, in affirming God’s sovereign control over the future, must look for a final break with the ambiguities of history in which God’s goodness is unambiguously made manifest.”⁶⁷ This is to say that providence in Ford’s understanding is God’s guidance of what is already occurring in history, not God’s complete control over it from a place of absolute sovereignty. As to the actual content of the divine lure, Ford suggests that “God has purposes for us in every moment of our existence, some rather trivial, others quite profound. His underlying aim is always the same, for he seeks our welfare both for our sakes and as the condition for his own welfare. This basic aim, however, is expressed in specific purposes appropriate to the particular conditions and opportunities confronting us at particular times.”⁶⁸ Thus, God lures us differently in every particular moment, but the overall aim is at the welfare of ourselves and all of reality. Elsewhere, in *Process Philosophy and Christian Thought*, Ford writes that “God’s

⁶⁶ Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, 281.

⁶⁷ Lewis S. Ford, *The Lure of God: A Biblical Background for Process Theism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 23.

⁶⁸ Ford, *Lure of God*, 75.

directive provides an initial aim for this process of integration, but unlike the efficient causal influences, that aim can be so drastically modified that its original purpose could be completely excluded from physical realization in the final outcome.”⁶⁹ In other words, Ford claims that the lure of God, the initial aim for an occasion, has a real influence on that occasion, but not the efficient causal influence of the past, since the initial aim can be excluded from the completed occasion. Ford considers the lure toward novelty to be God’s persuasion through the initial aim at every occasion for the best possible welfare of that occasion and the world as a whole.

As seen in Whitehead and Ford, the process concept of the lure toward novelty is the meeting of the primordial nature of God with the realities of the world. In Whitehead the lure is the initial desire that opens up the possibility of novelty in every moment through the primordial nature of God being presented to each occasion in the world. In Ford it is the initial aim that God uses to persuade occasions toward novelty in attempting to bring about the best possibilities for that occasion’s welfare. Thus the process understanding of the lure toward novelty is that it is the initial aim or desire that brings about novelty in the world through the primordial nature of God providing the best possibilities for each occasion.

Response to the divine lure toward novelty, and to the interconnected reality of the world, opens up the possibilities of goodness and sin. Although not often dealt with in process thought when compared to other concepts, it is important to look at the process understanding of sin. Sin is a real possibility that is frequently actualized in the process worldview. For process theologians, sin is both against God and against the rest of the world at the same time. It is rejection of the divine lure’s preferred offered possibilities, which are inherently both God-benefiting and world-benefiting. In pursuing lesser potentialities that are harmful for God and the

⁶⁹ Lewis S. Ford, “Divine Persuasion and the Triumph of Good,” in *Process Philosophy and Christian Thought*, ed. Delwin Brown, Ralph E. James, Jr., and Gene Reeves (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1971), 291.

world, sin is committed. Some process theologians, such as Suchocki in *The Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology*, go so far as to claim that original sin exists in a process metaphysic (which she refers to as relational theology instead of process theology within that text).

Suchocki, in *the Fall to Violence*, redefines sin as being primarily against creation, not primarily against God as Christianity has traditionally understood sin, writing that it is “the violation of creation, and therefore a rebellion against creation’s well-being. Insofar as creation involves God as creator, sin also entails a violation against God. But sin is defined primarily from the perspective of its relation to creation, whether self or others, and only secondarily defined in terms of its relation to God.”⁷⁰ Suchocki has reconceived of sin as being trespasses against creation rather than against God, although God is included in the greater web of the consequences of sin. Moving from sin to the concept of original sin, Suchocki claims that original sin can be said to exist within a process framework due to two considerations: (1) “we are creatures with a bent toward aggression that easily leads to intents and acts of violence,”⁷¹ and (2) “insofar as the culture perpetuates norms of well-being for some at the expense of others, to that degree the culture sanctions the ill-being of those others. Conscience, then, is corrupted from its earliest formation.”⁷² Taken together, these individual and societal factors result in a condition that Suchocki claims is rightly called original sin because “it describes a situation in which we become sinners without our consent. By the time one is capable of questioning one’s involvement in ill-being, one is by definition already involved.”⁷³ She sees sin, including original

⁷⁰ Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 16.

⁷¹ Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence*, 162.

⁷² Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence*, 164.

⁷³ Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence*, 164.

sin, as acts of ill-being, against individuals directly and against all of reality indirectly, caused both by the individual and by the culture in which that individual lives.

Taking Suchocki as representative of the wider process tradition, process theology understands sin to be acts or intentions of violence and ill-being against particular aspects of the world, and by the logical extension of interrelatedness against all of reality. In the process worldview, as seen in Suchocki's work, the concept of original sin can be seen as the structure of existence into which we are born, one that forms us as individuals with a bent toward violence and a cultural predisposition against the well-being of some groups of individuals and aspects of the world.

On the other side of the spectrum of possible responses to the divine lure is a full embodiment of novelty as the lure is embraced and its most positive possibility is chosen. Granted, there can be novelty even in sin, but not the fullness of novelty that is possible when the lure is followed more closely. Novelty itself is the emergence of completely new occasions in the process worldview, as opposed to the static repetition of the past. Although novelty is present in God as well, the main form of its appearance, which will be addressed now, is novelty in the world. The world's novelty arises from the divine lure, as already seen, and is the necessary continued advance of creativity in the world.

Whitehead addresses novelty itself in *Process and Reality* as creativity as it appears in the world. As an embodiment of creativity itself, novelty is the addition of something new into the multiplicity of the world through an actual occasion, as he claims in saying that "the novel entity is at once the togetherness of the 'many' which it finds, and also it is one among the disjunctive 'many' which it leaves; it is a novel entity, disjunctively among the many entities which it

synthesizes. The many become one, and are increased by one.”⁷⁴ Whitehead sees novelty as possible in every moment since “an actual occasion is a novel entity diverse from any entity in the ‘many’ which it unifies. Thus ‘creativity’ introduces novelty into the content of the many, which are the universe disjunctively. The ‘creative advance’ is the application of this ultimate principle of creativity to each novel situation which it originates.”⁷⁵ Therefore, Whitehead sees novelty as the ongoing advance of creativity by each actual occasion as it adds itself to the multiplicity of reality.

In *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, Cobb addresses novelty by calling it the “unrealized potentiality for transforming the world without destroying it.”⁷⁶ In essence, he is calling novelty the wealth of future possibilities for the world, as is reflected in his frequent use of the term creative transformation to describe it.⁷⁷ Further, he identifies novelty with Christ by claiming that “Christ is that ordered novelty insofar as it is incarnate in the world.”⁷⁸ Later, in *Beyond Dialogue*, Cobb writes that novelty is the goal of creativity, since creativity is always experienced as primordially ordered, “directed to the realization of novel intensities of feeling in the actual instances of creativity, that is, in such creatures as ourselves.”⁷⁹ By this, he is saying that novelty is creativity that has been ordered primordially so that it can emerge as intensities in events. Here he associates novelty not with the Logos or Christ, but with ordered creativity. Thus, in this text Cobb understands novelty to be less explicitly Christian than he did in *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*. But overall, Cobb understands novelty to be the ordered potentiality transformatively incarnate within the experienced world, which Christians call Christ.

⁷⁴ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 21.

⁷⁵ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 21.

⁷⁶ Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, 59.

⁷⁷ Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, 76.

⁷⁸ Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, 94.

⁷⁹ Cobb, *Beyond Dialogue*, 126.

Faber, in *God as Poet of the World: Exploring Process Theologies*, writes that novelty is “the new as the *radically* new,” elaborating that “its radical nature appears precisely where its appearance is accompanied by the unexpected, the surprising (or even frightening) element of something otherwise inaccessible that can *in no way* be derived from the old.”⁸⁰ He also highlights the importance of novelty for process thought, claiming that it is of “exponential significance in Whitehead’s paradigm” and “acquires key argumentative significance in the project of overcoming dualism, substantialism, subjectivism, and epistemological fundamentalism, since the oscillation between subject and object, becoming and change, concrescence and transition is mediated solely through novelty.”⁸¹ Faber is thus suggesting that novelty is that which is completely new in the world, separate from the past, moving subject to object and vice versa.

Novelty in the worldview of process thought is best understood as the emergence of creative potentiality in the occasions of the world. This reflects the concepts of novelty explored by the process theologians above: Whitehead’s ongoing advance of creativity by each actual occasion, Cobb’s incarnation of ordered potentiality, and Faber’s radically new that mediates between subject and object. Overall, novelty in process thought is the incarnation of creativity as the radically new emerges in occasions.

Just as the primordial nature of God plays an essential role in process metaphysics, so too does God’s other nature: the consequent nature. God’s reception and transformation of every moment of the world is represented by the concept of the consequent nature. Like the primordial nature, this is one of the more revolutionary theological concepts of process thought. The

⁸⁰ Faber, *God as Poet*, 82-83.

⁸¹ Faber, *God as Poet*, 82.

consequent nature is God's conscious reception and transformation of every occasion of reality, and implies a form of universalism wherein all things are brought into God.

Whitehead addresses the consequent nature in *Process and Reality*, where he calls it "the realization of the actual world in the unity of his nature, and through the transformation of his wisdom."⁸² He writes that the consequent nature is God's "judgment on the world. He saves the world as it passes into the immediacy of his own life. It is the judgment of a tenderness which loses nothing that can be saved. It is also the judgment of a wisdom which uses what in the temporal world is mere wreckage."⁸³ Whitehead thus claims here that the consequent nature is the salvation of the world in God, as God in God's consequent nature draws the entirety of the world's experiences into God's very self and transforms them. The consequent nature provides a form of salvation in which God "prehends every actuality for what it can be in such a perfected system – its sufferings, its sorrows, its failures, its triumphs, its immediacies of joy – woven by rightness of feeling into the harmony of the universal feeling, which is always immediate, always many, always one, always with novel advance, moving onward and never perishing."⁸⁴ In this way it can be said that God "does not create the world, he saves it: or, more accurately, he is the poet of the world, with tender patience leading it by his vision of truth, beauty, and goodness."⁸⁵ Immortality in the consequent nature differs from objective immortality's lack of immediacy, i.e., subjectivity, by being a "phase of perfected actuality, in which the many are one everlastingly, without the qualification of any loss either of individual identity or of

⁸² Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 345.

⁸³ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 346.

⁸⁴ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 346.

⁸⁵ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 346.

completeness of unity. In everlastingness, immediacy is reconciled with objective immortality.”⁸⁶

However, this is not to say that the consequent nature is merely the salvation of the world, as it also has a significant impact on God. For God, the consequent nature is “the fulfilment of his experience by his reception of the multiple freedom of actuality into the harmony of his own actualization.”⁸⁷ This shows that because of the consequent nature, the world has a significant impact on God, in part comprising God’s self. The consequent nature also has a role in the initial aim presented to the world, through what Whitehead calls the fourth creative phase: “what is done in the world is transformed into a reality in heaven, and the reality in heaven passes back into the world. By reason of this reciprocal relation, the love in the world passes into the love in heaven, and floods back again into the world. In this sense, God is the great companion – the fellow-sufferer who understands.”⁸⁸ In fact, Whitehead identifies this movement of the consequent nature back into the world as divine providence, writing that “the action of the fourth phase is the love of God for the world. It is the particular providence for particular occasions.”⁸⁹ Thus, the consequent nature is more than just the reception of the world, it is also the continuation of the world’s effects within God as God providentially guides the world in the initial aim. In *Process and Reality*, Whitehead understands the consequent nature as the completion of God through the transformation and reception of the world’s experiences into God’s nature.

Cobb deals with the consequent nature in his writings similarly to Whitehead’s treatment of it. In *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, he addresses the consequent nature of God by writing that in

⁸⁶ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 350-351.

⁸⁷ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 349.

⁸⁸ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 351.

⁸⁹ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 351.

a process understanding, God, like all of reality, “not only functions in the becoming of other entities but also is constituted as a synthesis of their contributions,” a synthesis through which “the world is completed and becomes everlasting” in God.⁹⁰ The consequent nature of God is this function by which the world is synthesized in God, “but whereas in the world the synthesis depends on extreme selectivity, so that most of what is offered is rejected, such limitation is not present in the Kingdom. God’s aim is so inclusive that he can receive and synthesize into good what in worldly occasions would be mutually destructive elements, or elements incompatible with their limited aims.”⁹¹ Although this means that God incorporates all occasions into the divine self through the consequent nature, Cobb also notes that the occasions “differ in their contribution according to their intrinsic value, their richness, or their own immediacy.”⁹² In his contribution to *Trinity in Process*, Cobb explores an aspect of the consequent nature seen in Whitehead that receives comparatively little attention: the influence of the consequent nature on the world in the fourth phase of Whitehead’s cosmic process.⁹³ Through this phase, Cobb is able to claim that “the derivation of the initial aim of each occasion involves the Consequent Nature,” stating that “both the Primordial Nature and the Consequent Nature are involved in an integrated way.”⁹⁴ Thus Cobb can say that “both the Primordial Nature and the Consequent Nature participate in constituting every occasion.”⁹⁵ This aspect of the consequent nature, its return to the world alongside the primordial nature, is what allows God always to present the best possibilities to every particular occasion. Throughout his writings, Cobb understands the consequent nature of God as God’s constitution by the world as God receives the entirety of the

⁹⁰ Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, 226.

⁹¹ Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, 226.

⁹² Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, 226.

⁹³ Cobb, “Relativization,” 18.

⁹⁴ Cobb, “Relativization,” 17.

⁹⁵ Cobb, “Relativization,” 19.

world, which is then incorporated into the initial aim presented to the subsequent events of the world.

Ford explores the consequent nature of God in *The Lure of God*, particularly how it relates to the initial aim. He writes that “God’s eternal nature is supplemented by a temporal nature, itself directly dependent upon the world’s finite actualizations for its concrete content of experience. In himself God knows only pure, unbroken, nontemporal unity, but this knowledge is further enriched by the temporal experience of the world’s plurality.”⁹⁶ Ford is suggesting that the infinite nontemporal primordial nature is complemented by the temporal consequent nature, which is composed of God’s reception of the ongoing experiences of the world. The experiences of the world are transformed in God’s consequent nature, with Ford claiming that there is a “weaving together of the actual and the ideal,” which “is the consummation of the world in God’s experience, but it is also our future, since the ideals used to bring the actuality experienced by God into harmonious unity thereby also become ideals and lures for actualization in the temporal world.”⁹⁷ He sees the consequent nature as the transformation of all the experiences of the world into God’s experience, culminating in an appropriate adjustment of the initial aims based on the experiences of the world that were received by the consequent nature.

Elsewhere, in his contribution to *World without End: Christian Eschatology from a Process Perspective*, Ford addresses subjective immortality as the consequent nature’s preservation of creaturely subjectivity, writing that “subjective form, when energized by creativity, constitutes an occasion’s subjectivity,” and that “the subjective form, while it is objectively definite to be prehended, becomes the subjective means of divine experience. The material basis in the physical world is abstracted from, and the form receives a new basis in

⁹⁶ Ford, *Lure of God*, 84.

⁹⁷ Ford, *Lure of God*, 41.

terms of the divine experience itself. Its mortal body is replaced by a ‘resurrection body’ which is none other than divine experience.”⁹⁸ Through these writings, it is clear that Ford understands the consequent nature to be the temporal aspect of God, in which God receives from the world and transforms the world, resulting both in subjective immortality for the occasions of the world and in a more appropriate initial aim for subsequent occasions.

In *God, Christ, Church*, Suchocki identifies the consequent nature of God as “God’s knowledge of actuality,”⁹⁹ emphasizing the consequent nature as an aspect of God’s knowledge. She claims that in God’s knowledge of actuality “every actuality that comes into existence, human or otherwise, is felt by God in its entirety, just as it felt itself.”¹⁰⁰ In this understanding, “God is the supremely related one, with a fullness not possible to finite occasions” because “God can feel every actuality in the universe in its entirety.”¹⁰¹ For Suchocki, then, the consequent nature represents the movement of the world into God’s self as God prehends the world. She also sees the consequent nature as the first step of subjective immortality within God, writing that “we are made partakers of God’s life through a movement from the edges of God to the everlasting depths of God, from God’s consequent nature to integration with God’s primordial nature,” which “is a process that moves from resurrection through judgment into transformation.”¹⁰² This existing in God is contrasted with existing with God when she writes in *World without End* that “the occasion exists not *with* God, as Bracken suggests, but *in* God, as a partaker of the divine nature. I argued that the continued existence of the subjectively immortal

⁹⁸ Lewis S. Ford, “An Alternative Theory of Subjective Immortality,” in *World without End: Christian Eschatology from a Process Perspective*, ed. Joseph A. Bracken (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 123-124.

⁹⁹ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 67.

¹⁰⁰ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 66-67.

¹⁰¹ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 251.

¹⁰² Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 203.

entity is possible not because of its own continued seriality of concrescence, but because of the divine concrescence, which is itself governed by the divine subjective aim.”¹⁰³

She locates the salvation of the world within the consequent nature, “a mighty transition from a finite subjectivity that is alone with itself to that same subjectivity within the presence of God.”¹⁰⁴ Comparing it to traditional understandings of resurrection, she claims “the world is not simply transposed to God, so that it exists in a sort of parallel state. The world is *transformed* in God. This is why resurrection, which connotes transformation, is a more precise term than immortality, which could imply simple continuance.”¹⁰⁵ She further explains that subjective immortality, or resurrection, exists in process theology because “God prehends the completed subject’s satisfaction. Since God feels the totality of this satisfaction, God feels as well the subjectivity of that satisfaction – and, therefore, resurrecting – it into the divine life.”¹⁰⁶ Suchocki is saying that the consequent nature of God is God’s perfect knowledge of every experience in the universe, through God’s transformative prehension, God’s resurrection, of every subject in its entirety.

In *World without End*, edited by Bracken, the focus is on eschatology, which is related to the consequent nature of God. Bracken summarizes process theology’s concept of eschatology by relating it to the consequent nature, writing that “instead of being simply objects of thought within the divine mind, actual entities can co-exist with God, share the divine life forever.”¹⁰⁷ Bracken says this kind of subjective immortality within the consequent nature of God is possible because of a Whiteheadian understanding of societies, since “Whiteheadian societies are

¹⁰³ Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, “Afterwords,” in Bracken, *World without End*, 207.

¹⁰⁴ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 205.

¹⁰⁵ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 206.

¹⁰⁶ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 207.

¹⁰⁷ Joseph A. Bracken, “Subjective Immortality in a Neo-Whiteheadian Context,” in Bracken, *World without End*, 74.

structured fields of activity for their constituent actual occasions. For, as already noted, in that case the fields of activity proper to separate Whiteheadian societies can combine or merge so as to create common fields of activity in which the ontological independence of the different subjectivities (Whiteheadian societies) can be guaranteed.”¹⁰⁸ Essentially, this is claiming that subjective immortality is possible within the consequent nature of God because the personal societies of individuals would merge together within the greater society of the consequent nature of God, while still being able to maintain their ontological subjective independence. Other authors also explore eschatology and subjective immortality in this work, including Keller and Anna Case-Winters. Keller writes that “God, in the consequent nature, may *see* how ‘what in the temporal world is mere wreckage’ might get constructively recycled. But it does not *do* it... God would thus see *in beauty*. God would see the brutality – beautifully: not indifferently, but within the immense, *prismatic* panorama.”¹⁰⁹ God does not solve the problems of the world in the consequent nature, but sees them as they are and how they could be solved. Case-Winters says that “at our end, in the resurrection when we are taken up into God’s own being, we are co-present with God and experience ourselves as God experiences us. We ‘know as we are known’... We see what we were and what we could have been. To see ourselves in this way is to experience judgment.”¹¹⁰ These authors thus see the consequent nature as the ultimate unity of God and the world as the world in its entirety is prehended by God, considering it to be the judgment and salvation of the world in God.

Overall, the process concept of the consequent nature of God can be understood as God’s positive prehension and integration of the entirety of the world’s experiences into God’s divine

¹⁰⁸ Bracken, “Subjective Immortality,” 83.

¹⁰⁹ Catherine Keller, “The Mystery of the Insoluble Evil: Violence and Evil in Marjorie Suchocki,” in Bracken, *World without End*, 65-66.

¹¹⁰ Anna Case-Winters, “Endings and Ends,” in Bracken, *World without End*, 187.

self. This understanding can be seen in the specific views of the consequent nature seen in the process theologians above. It can be seen in Whitehead's transformation and reception of the world into God, in Cobb through God's everlasting synthesis of the world within the divine self, and in Ford's temporal nature of God transforming the world to give it subjective immortality and the best initial aims possible. It can also be seen in Suchocki's divine perfect knowledge and transformative prehension of every experience in the universe, and in *World without End's* judgment and salvation of the world through unity with God. The consequent nature is thus the transformation and reception of every experience of the world in its synthetic unification as it is felt by God, allowing God both to save the world and to present the best possible initial aims to the world.

From a Christian standpoint, one might wonder where Christ fits into all of this. Over the decades of process theology, various answers have been given by different process theologians. Overall, however, it seems that Christ, the Logos, is identified most strongly with the lure toward novelty coming out of the primordial nature of God. But this is not to say that Christ is absent from other elements of process theology. Christ can also be seen in the consequent nature's reception and transformation of the world, and in the incarnation of novelty within the world. Thus, for a Christian process theologian, it is true to say that Christ is present in all the work of God (as is also the case for classical theology), although there are particular areas where Christ is more readily apparent.

Whitehead does not directly address Christology to the extent that his successors will. But the issue of Christ and Christianity's relationship with process thought arises first in Whitehead. He finds mainstream Christian theology to be unusable in how it deals with God and Christ, writing that "when the Western world accepted Christianity, Caesar conquered; and the

received text of Western theology was edited by his lawyers,” such that “the Church gave unto God the attributes which belonged exclusively to Caesar.”¹¹¹ Whitehead further criticizes the vast majority of theistic religions, in which “three strains of thought emerge which, amid many variations in detail, respectively fashion God in the image of an imperial ruler, God in the image of a personification of moral energy, God in the image of an ultimate philosophical principle.”¹¹² The alternative, which Whitehead endorses as a positive theological understanding of God (and thus Christ), is present as a minority within Christianity, “in the Galilean origin of Christianity,” an alternative that “dwells upon the tender elements of the world, which slowly and in quietness operate by love; and it finds purpose in the present immediacy of a kingdom not of this world. Love neither rules, nor is it unmoved; also it is a little oblivious as to morals. It does not look to the future; for it finds its own reward in the immediate present,” and in this way it “does not fit very well with any of the three main strands of thought. It does not emphasize the ruling Caesar, or the ruthless moralist, or the unmoved mover.”¹¹³ In essence, Whitehead is claiming that in Christ a different vision of God is presented, one in which Christ as love dwells within the present world, acting to bring about the world’s flourishing. Taking these thoughts into account, it is clear that Whitehead’s view is that Christ offers an alternative to dominant theologies by providing a vision of love dwelling in the present world.

Cobb has made significant contributions to process theology’s Christology, building on Whitehead’s view. In *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, he approaches Christ as the incarnate Logos of creative transformation, writing that Christ “refers to the Logos *as* incarnate, hence *as* the process of creative transformation in and of the world.”¹¹⁴ As such, he finds that the person of

¹¹¹ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 342.

¹¹² Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 342-343.

¹¹³ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 343.

¹¹⁴ Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, 76.

Christ is the embodiment of novelty as it arises in the world. He identifies novelty with the Logos and Christ as its incarnation, but goes on to affirm Christ as Jesus by writing that “the distinctive structure of Jesus’ existence was characterized by personal identity with the immanent Logos. Hence it is a matter of literal truth to affirm the identity of Jesus with Christ. In all things Christ is present. Jesus *was* Christ.”¹¹⁵ He describes this distinct structure of Jesus as one in which “the presence of the Logos would share in constituting selfhood; that is, it would be identical with the center or principle in terms of which other elements in experience are ordered.”¹¹⁶ Jesus’s person as both divine and human is addressed by claiming that “Jesus, without in any way ceasing to be human, participated in that one structure of existence in which the self is coconstituted by the presence of God.”¹¹⁷ Later, in *Beyond Dialogue*, Cobb’s assessment of Christ is slightly different in its nuances, as Christ is everywhere “as the life-giving call to be more than we have been both for our own sake and for the sake of others.”¹¹⁸ In this text, Cobb sees the nature of Christ to be such that the Truth, which is Christ, can be found in Jesus, writing that “we believe that Christ is the Truth, and that we dimly but decisively apprehend this Truth in Jesus and participate in it through him.”¹¹⁹ Thus in these works Cobb sees the person of Christ as the incarnation of the creative transformation of the Logos, with a unique structure of existence in which the creative transformation of the Logos is perfectly incarnated in the human Jesus through his adoption of the initial aim of the Logos as his own coconstitutive aim.

Cobb, in *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, summarizes the work of Christ in the life of Jesus of Nazareth as creative transformation by writing that “Jesus’ words open their hearers to Christ by

¹¹⁵ Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, 142.

¹¹⁶ Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, 139.

¹¹⁷ Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, 170-171.

¹¹⁸ Cobb, *Beyond Dialogue*, 135.

¹¹⁹ Cobb, *Beyond Dialogue*, 119.

shattering established self-images in a context of ultimate reassurance. Entry into Jesus' field of force and progressive conformation to him likewise opens believers to the Christ."¹²⁰ He is summarizing the two ways in which he analyzes Jesus Christ's works upon the world: "his message and his objective efficacy."¹²¹ In his message, "Jesus unveils us to ourselves by placing us in a quite unaccustomed perspective."¹²² In his objective efficacy, "the real past event of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, involving his total being, has objectively established a sphere of effectiveness or a field of force into which people can enter. To enter the field is to have the efficacy of the salvation event become casually determinative of increasing aspects of one's total life."¹²³ But Christ also works in all things, not just in the life of Jesus of Nazareth, since "Christ transforms the world by persuading it toward relevant novelty."¹²⁴ Related to this, later in *Beyond Dialogue* Cobb sees the work of Christ as "introducing into our existence, moment by moment possibilities for our self-actualization that lead to good for ourselves and for others."¹²⁵ Cobb thus claims the work of Christ is the incarnation of creative transformation, especially where it is found in the message and objective efficacy of Jesus, resulting in the transformation of self and tradition.

Cobb's overall Christology views Christ as the key to learning about God, writing that "if it is in Jesus that we perceive what God's immanence is and does, then it is from Jesus that we should learn what God is like."¹²⁶ Although for Cobb Christ is centered on Jesus, he also makes room for Christ to be bigger than Christianity alone is capable of encapsulating. For him, Christ is the creative and transformative incarnation of the Logos, with a unique structure of existence

¹²⁰ Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, 126.

¹²¹ Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, 99.

¹²² Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, 107.

¹²³ Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, 117.

¹²⁴ Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, 186.

¹²⁵ Cobb, *Beyond Dialogue*, 135.

¹²⁶ Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, 168.

coconstituted by the initial aim of the Logos, who works to transform all things creatively and redemptively, especially seen through the message and objective efficacy of Jesus of Nazareth.

Griffin writes of the person of Christ that “in our context Jesus can only be understood as ‘savior’ if he is seen as the decisive clue to the nature of reality.”¹²⁷ And he finds the person of Christ to be exactly that, claiming “the doctrine of Jesus’ person that is being proposed here is that he was God’s supreme act.”¹²⁸ Griffin explains Jesus’s unity with God by stating that “partly because of the content of the divine aims given to Jesus during his active ministry, and partly because of Jesus’ conformance to these aims, the vision of reality expressed through his sayings and actions is the supreme expression of God’s character, purpose, and mode of agency, and is therefore appropriately apprehended as the decisive revelation of the same.”¹²⁹ Griffin understands the person of Christ to be the decisive and supreme revealing act of God, with Christ’s nature comprised of both the human Jesus and God, combined through the unique particular aims provided by God and the unique way in which Jesus is constituted by the divine initial aims.

Addressing the work of Christ, Griffin claims that “the aims given to Jesus and actualized by him during his active ministry were such that the basic vision of reality contained in his message of word and deed was the supreme expression of God’s eternal character and purpose.”¹³⁰ It is also worth noting that through Jesus Griffin endorses a reconsideration of God’s power since “there is nothing about Jesus’ life and fate that suggests that God’s activity involves a complete control over the activities of men. The crucifixion of God’s agent suggests

¹²⁷ David Ray Griffin, *A Process Christology* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973), 20.

¹²⁸ Griffin, *Christology*, 216.

¹²⁹ Griffin, *Christology*, 231-232.

¹³⁰ Griffin, *Christology*, 218.

just the contrary.”¹³¹ The salvific content of Christ’s work can be seen as a reorientation of those who follow Christ, because for Griffin “after the revelation in Christ man is capable of receiving aims which more directly express God’s character and purpose, the divine Logos,” since “whereas before revelation God was present in man as Holy Spirit, afterward God can begin to be in him also as Logos.”¹³² Griffin understands the work of Christ as a revelatory work of salvation in which God’s aims for the world are made known.

Taking into account both Jesus Christ’s person and work, Griffin sees Christ as having a unique role. Christ is vital for our understanding of reality, including God, through Christ’s unique relationship with God, since Griffin claims that “Jesus was not only one who had special insight into the nature of things; his special activity was based on the impulses given to him by God. He was not merely a teacher about God, he was a special act of God.”¹³³ For Griffin, then, the human-divine relationship of Christ is entirely unique, with Jesus embodying the Logos as much as is humanly possible, at least in decisive moments of his life. Griffin thus sees Christ as the ultimate revelation of God and of the world, having been embodied in Jesus of Nazareth in a unique and decisive way.

Through these three theologians’ understandings of Christ, it is possible to ascertain a general picture of process theology’s Christology. Christian process thought sees Christ as a unique embodiment of God in the world. Although each of these three theologians differs slightly, as can be expected, the hearts of their Christologies exemplify this general process Christology, which is shared with most Christians. Whitehead’s Christ as offering an alternative vision of love dwelling in the present world has the relativity of reality and God’s desire for the best possibilities of reality at its heart. Cobb’s view of Christ as the incarnation of the Logos in

¹³¹ Griffin, *Christology* 225.

¹³² Griffin, *Christology*, 242.

¹³³ Griffin, *Christology*, 218.

redemptive creative transformation, seen in Jesus through his unique structure of existence, refers primarily to the beneficial effect Christ has on reality for the emergence of positive creativity. And Griffin understands Christ as the ultimate revelation of God, seen uniquely and decisively in Jesus of Nazareth, which is built around the idea that the God revealed in Christ seeks the best possibilities of the world through relationality and novelty. Thus, for process theology Christ is the revelation of God, representing God's love dwelling in the world through the incarnation of creative transformation, seen particularly in Jesus of Nazareth.

One major emphasis of process thought that must be addressed in a cycle of soteriology, beyond the terms already explored, is the fact that the movements of God and the world toward and within one another have a reciprocal nature. The divine primordial nature, the lure toward novelty, novelty itself, the consequent nature of God, and Christ all embody aspects of reciprocity. The primordial nature, as the receptacle of pure potentiality, requires the world for actualization. The lure toward novelty, as the movement of the primordial nature into the world, relies on the two-way relationship between God and the world in order to be effective. Novelty itself is the embodiment of God and the world together as the world's actualization of God's provided potentiality. The consequent nature is the unity of the world with God in relationship with one another, since it is where God brings the world into God's self and is in turn influenced by and partially constituted by the events of the world. And Christ, being the perfect incarnation of God's novelty in the world, embodies the reciprocal relationship between God and the world. The broader brushstrokes of this mutually reciprocal nature between God and the world are addressed by several process theologians.

Whitehead systematically explores reciprocity in *Process and Reality*, where he writes that "neither God, nor the World, reaches static completion. Both are in the grip of the ultimate

metaphysical ground, the creative advance into novelty. Either of them, God and the World, is the instrument of novelty for the other.”¹³⁴ Whitehead is thus saying that the relationship between the world and God is essentially a reciprocal relationship, wherein each depends on the other, since “in God’s nature, permanence is primordial and flux is derivative from the World: in the World’s nature, flux is primordial and permanence is derivative from God. Also the World’s nature is a primordial datum for God; and God’s nature is a primordial datum for the World. Creation achieves the reconciliation of permanence and flux when it has reached its final term which is everlastingness – the Apotheosis of the World.”¹³⁵ Even as early as *Religion in the Making*, Whitehead claims that “apart from God, there would be no actual world; and apart from the actual world with its creativity, there would be no rational explanation of the ideal vision which constitutes God,” already showing an emphasis of mutual dependence between God and the world.¹³⁶

Nowhere is this better illustrated than in Whitehead’s six antithetical statements in

Process and Reality:

It is as true to say that God is permanent and the World fluent, as that the World is permanent and God is fluent.

It is as true to say that God is one and the World many, as that the World is one and God many.

It is as true to say that, in comparison with the World, God is actual eminently, as that, in comparison with God, the World is actual eminently.

It is as true to say that the World is immanent in God, as that God is immanent in the World.

It is as true to say that God transcends the World, as that the World transcends God.

It is as true to say that God creates the World, as that the World creates God.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 349.

¹³⁵ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 348.

¹³⁶ Alfred North Whitehead, *Religion in the Making* (1926; repr., New York: Meridian Books, 1960), 150-151.

¹³⁷ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 348.

While at first glance this may appear incongruous or even blasphemous to classical theology, it makes perfect theological sense that a God who truly loves the world would be internally impacted and altered by events from the world. The world and God are in a relationship of mutual growth and support, wherein each receives from the other what it needs to continue on its own path. In his writings, Whitehead clearly sees the world and God as in an interdependent relationship, wherein God needs the world for actualization of the unity of the divine vision in a multiplicity, and wherein the world needs God in order to unify the multiplicity of reality and allow the existence of novelty in the world, all of which is necessary for the ongoing advance of creativity that results in reality as we know it.

Cobb addresses God and the world's reciprocity in *Christ in a Pluralistic Age* by claiming that through Jesus we can see how God works alongside and with the world to create reality, rather than through divine power as traditionally conceived. Cobb claims that if we understand who God is through Jesus, "then God is not one who forces and compels but one who lures and persuades. He is not one who gives a fixed, eternal law to which external obedience is demanded on threat of punishment, but one who calls people beyond every established structure and principle for the sake of creative new possibilities."¹³⁸ In *God and the World*, he also sees mutual relationship between God and the world as witnessed by Christ's inherent concern for and relationship with the world, writing that "a devotion to the divine which turns its back upon the world is a rejection of the God known in Jesus Christ."¹³⁹ Therefore, Cobb views the reciprocal relationship between the world and God as a relationship in which commitment to God and commitment to the world are the same thing, with God and the world being intimately interrelated.

¹³⁸ Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, 168.

¹³⁹ John B. Cobb, Jr., *God and the World* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1998), 9.

In his contribution to *World without End*, Bracken considers the reciprocal nature of the God-world relationship to be one in which both God and the world need one another, since “in order for God to become fully actual and conscious, the divine primordial nature must be integrated with the divine consequent nature. But what is the divine consequent nature but God’s ongoing prehension of the ever-increasing community of finite actual entities constituting the cosmic process?”¹⁴⁰ And, on the other hand, the world needs God since “what is the reality of the world apart from God as the sole transcendent entity, the only entity which survives the passage of time?”¹⁴¹ In *Society and Spirit*, Bracken makes clear that God and the world are both parts of a larger framework in which they each participate in their unique ways, claiming that the divine persons “do not in themselves constitute Ultimate Reality; rather, the divine persons plus all their creatures constitute Ultimate Reality. The society of the divine persons is only a subsociety, albeit the most important subsociety, within Ultimate Reality, understood as an all-embracing cosmic society.”¹⁴² Ultimate Reality is composed of both God and the world in their interrelationship, neither one apart from the other. Bracken understands the reciprocal relationship between the world and God as the relationship of interdependent subsocieties within the larger Ultimate Reality, which is the all-embracing cosmic society.

In *On the Mystery*, Keller explores God and the world’s reciprocity, claiming that “whatever we become registers *in* the divine. We can imagine an infinite intimacy: the divine breathing out, unfolding, into the world, into us, in passion for becoming; and breathing in, folding us back into God-self, in the cosmic compassion for all creatures.”¹⁴³ There is a definite movement here, one that moves from God into the world and then back into God from the world,

¹⁴⁰ Bracken, “Subjective Immortality,” 76.

¹⁴¹ Bracken, “Subjective Immortality,” 76.

¹⁴² Bracken, *Society and Spirit*, 149.

¹⁴³ Keller, *On the Mystery*, 125.

an ongoing cycle of mutual reciprocity necessary for the continuation of reality. Keller also affirms the interactivity of God and the world in *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming*, summarizing that “creator and creature create, effect, *each other*; not from a prior nothing but from their shared preconditions. This radical interdependence would take place within the infinite ‘creativity.’”¹⁴⁴ Keller thus sees the reciprocal relationship between the world and God as a relationship in which God and the world participate in one another, creating and affecting each other in an infinite intimacy.

One of the ways in which Faber explores the reciprocal relationship between God and the world is through his analysis of Whitehead’s six antitheses seen above. He writes that “these antitheses articulate the intensively interwoven character of the processes of God and world as *a single, grand, creative, free, and relational happening*. These antitheses – as such unique in Whitehead’s work – constitute to a certain extent the ‘final summary’ of process theology’s understanding of the relationship between God and world and as such a synopsis of the creative process as a whole.”¹⁴⁵ In writing this, Faber means that Whitehead’s antitheses summarize the rest of the creative process by bringing together God and the world in their interrelationship to illustrate the ongoing advance of creativity.

In his *The Becoming of God*, Faber moves beyond a weak mutual reciprocity to consider the mutual immanence of God and the world as one of the foundations of Whitehead’s system. There, he writes that “God and the world are in their own distinctive way creative, they embody in their own way unity and multiplicity, and they move in a mode of contrast counter to each other, toward each other, and in one another, unmixed and undivided. The conceptual expression with which Whitehead comprises these dynamic contrasts is *mutual immanence* – in a true sense

¹⁴⁴ Catherine Keller, *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming* (London: Routledge, 2003), 218.

¹⁴⁵ Faber, *God as Poet*, 157.

the ultimate reality.”¹⁴⁶ He is claiming that the mutual immanence of God and the world, in which each can be found immanent in and transcendent of the other as they create each other, as a whole comprises the ongoing advance of creativity as the ultimate of ultimates. Not only is the mutuality between God and the world an inherent part of the philosophical system, it in fact is the system. Faber goes on to compare theopoetics and mutual immanence as sharing key features, since “both exhibit the same three characteristics in the relationship between God and the world: their mutual incoherence without identity; their mutual transcendence without isolation; their mutual resonance or oscillation without ever abandoning processuality.”¹⁴⁷ This is a far deeper relationship than mere reciprocity. From Faber’s perspective the relationship between the world and God is the relationship between two mutually immanent parts comprising the greater whole of the creative reality that we experience.

A clear image of how process thought sees the God-world relationship becomes apparent through these theologians’ writings on mutuality. The world and God move within each other such that both God and the world require one another for their own existence. Whitehead sees the God-world relationship as an interdependent relationship, with God needing the world for actualization and the world needing God for the existence of novelty. Cobb understands it as an indivisibly interrelated relationship, wherein commitment to the world or to God requires commitment to the other as well. For Bracken, God and the world are subsocieties within the greater society of Ultimate Reality, subsocieties that depend on one another. Keller deals with it as an intimate interrelationship in which God and the world can be said in some sense to co-create one another. Faber sees the God-world relationship as being the two mutually immanent parts of the ultimate of ultimates that creates reality. Overall, the process understanding of the

¹⁴⁶ Roland Faber, *The Becoming of God: Process Theology, Philosophy, and Multireligious Engagement* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017), 97.

¹⁴⁷ Faber, *Becoming of God*, 187.

God-world relationship is that the relationship is one of profound interdependence, wherein God requires the world and the world requires God, each in some way co-creating the other as part of a larger whole.

Despite mainstream process theology's focus on the mutual relationship between the world and God, there is also an element within the process tradition in which God's unique place within the system is emphasized. There are a handful of ways in which God is different from the rest of reality in a process metaphysic. God is everlasting, unlike the world. God alone provides God's own initial aims. And while the occasions of the world move from physical pole to mental pole, God exhibits a reversal of poles in moving from the mental pole to the physical pole, or to take it even further God has a completely inverse process when compared to the rest of reality. These differences between God and the world will be seen in several process thinkers.

Even beginning with Whitehead, God's uniqueness is made apparent. Whitehead sees God as the creator of the world in a limited sense, since "God is the aboriginal instance of this creativity, and is therefore the aboriginal condition which qualifies its action. It is the function of actuality to characterize the creativity, and God is the eternal primordial character."¹⁴⁸ For Whitehead, then, God is the creator of the world in the sense that God provides the conditions for each moment to create itself, thereby being unique in providing this opening, yet still in an interdependent relationship with the rest of reality. Whitehead's God is different through being primordial, as he states in writing that "God's existence is not generically different from that of other actual entities, except that he is 'primordial,'"¹⁴⁹ in the sense that for God's primordial nature "there is no past. Thus the ideal realization of conceptual feeling takes the precedence."¹⁵⁰ Another way in which God is different from the rest of reality is that God's dipolar nature is

¹⁴⁸ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 225.

¹⁴⁹ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 75.

¹⁵⁰ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 87.

reversed from that of all other actual occasions, with Whitehead claiming that while on the one hand “an actual entity in the temporal world is to be conceived as originated by physical experience with its process of completion motivated by consequent, conceptual experience initially derived from God,” on the other hand “God is to be conceived as originate by conceptual experience with his process of completion motivated by consequent physical experience, initially derived from the temporal world.”¹⁵¹ The everlastingness of God’s consequent nature is also something unique to God, with everlastingness being used to describe “the property of combining creative advance with the retention of mutual immediacy.”¹⁵²

Despite Whitehead’s emphasis on the mutuality of the God-world relationship, the two sides of the relationship, God and the world, are not identical, since “God is the infinite ground of all mentality, the unity of vision seeking physical multiplicity,” while “the World is the multiplicity of finites, actualities seeking a perfected unity.”¹⁵³ Through God’s efforts in guiding the world, God “is the poet of the world, with tender patience leading it by his vision of truth, beauty, and goodness.”¹⁵⁴ Early in his philosophical career, Whitehead hints at some of the ways in which God is unique in *Science and the Modern World*, writing that we need God since “God is the ultimate limitation, and His existence is the ultimate irrationality. For no reason can be given for just that limitation which it stands in His nature to impose. God is not concrete, but He is the ground for concrete actuality. No reason can be given for the nature of God, because that nature is the ground of rationality.”¹⁵⁵ For Whitehead God is unique in that God is the creator and poet of the world, guiding the world and dependent on the world even while having a

¹⁵¹ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 345.

¹⁵² Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 346.

¹⁵³ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 348-349.

¹⁵⁴ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 346.

¹⁵⁵ Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (1925; repr., New York: The Free Press, 1967), 178.

reversed polarity that moves from God's mental pole of the primordial nature to God's physical pole of the consequent nature, where God is uniquely everlasting.

Hartshorne modifies Whitehead, but still in his theology God's uniqueness is plainly visible. In agreement with Whitehead, Hartshorne writes that "it would be a misunderstanding of the social doctrine to accuse it of denying the radical difference between God and nondivine beings"¹⁵⁶ This metaphysically distinct uniqueness of God includes the fact that "while all beings have some measure of 'absoluteness' or independence of relationships and some measure of 'relativity,' God, and only God, is in one aspect of his being strictly or maximally absolute, and in another aspect no less strictly or maximally relative."¹⁵⁷ Hartshorne amplifies this unique aspect of God being both fully absolute and fully relative to claim that "God is *universal object as well as universal subject*. No creature is universal in either role."¹⁵⁸ Aside from these examples of God's metaphysical uniqueness, Hartshorne also sees God alone as necessary (albeit a necessity requiring contingent reality), stating that "God-with-creatures is the answer, not either side by itself. The Creator is eternally and necessarily creative, it is only the particular creatures whose very existence is contingent. Necessity and contingency are necessary to each other. But the necessity that there be some contingent things or other is entirely consistent with the genuine contingency of those things."¹⁵⁹ God is the necessary creator who requires the existence of a contingent world. Thus, for Hartshorne God is unique in that God alone is defined through universal categories, that God alone can be both maximally absolute and maximally relative, and that God is the only specifically necessary entity.

¹⁵⁶ Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God* (1948; repr., New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 30.

¹⁵⁷ Hartshorne, *Divine Relativity*, 32.

¹⁵⁸ Charles Hartshorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (Albany: State University of New York, 1984), 110.

¹⁵⁹ Hartshorne, *Omnipotence*, 82.

In Cobb's writings as well, God is found to be unique. In *God and the World*, despite the emphasis on the mutual reciprocity of God and the world, Cobb is clear that there are ways in which God is unique, since Cobb is guided by a vision of the world as creation that "implies *both* the intrinsic importance of the world *and* its radical subordination to God."¹⁶⁰ And although God is similar to the rest of reality in being an energy-event, there are significant differences between them,¹⁶¹ such as the fact that "God's standpoint is all-inclusive, and so, in a sense, we are parts of God."¹⁶² However, it must be noted that "God and the creatures interact as separate entities, while God includes the standpoints of all of them in his omnispatial standpoint. In this sense God is everywhere, but he is not everything."¹⁶³ In *Jesus' Abba*, Cobb sees God as unique because God (Abba) is understood as the source of all life in the universe, claiming that "Abba seeks the realization of intrinsic value. This is Abba's working in us, and it is Abba's working in all living things. Indeed, it is Abba's working in every individual thing. Intrinsic value is the quality of subjectivity. If it were not for Abba, there would be no reason for the universe to produce and promote organisms."¹⁶⁴ Through the insights of these writings, Cobb's understanding of God's uniqueness is that God is the source of life and novelty for all of reality, which God alone is capable of receiving in its entirety through God's uniquely all-inclusive standpoint.

Suchocki similarly claims that there are ways in which God is unique within a process perspective. In *God, Christ, Church* she claims that "whereas every finite subject begins from the multiplicity of feelings of the past, and modifies these feelings into a single new unity, God 'begins' with a primordial unity of all possibilities."¹⁶⁵ For Suchocki, this reversal of poles in

¹⁶⁰ Cobb, *God and the World*, 10.

¹⁶¹ Cobb, *God and the World*, 71.

¹⁶² Cobb, *God and the World*, 79.

¹⁶³ Cobb, *God and the World*, 79-80.

¹⁶⁴ Cobb, *Jesus' Abba*, 100.

¹⁶⁵ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 204.

God means that “God, and only God, can feel the entirety of the other,”¹⁶⁶ and stating that “God’s subjectivity contains and transforms every other subjectivity that has ever existed. God is many and one in a way totally different from anything in our experience.”¹⁶⁷ Through the reversal of poles, God is able to bring into God’s nature every occasion of reality as it exists in itself. The initial aim of God’s primordial nature and the reception of the world in God’s consequent nature allow Suchocki to make the claim that “God is the source and destiny of the world: source, through provision of the initial aim; destiny, through prehension and transformation in God.”¹⁶⁸ In *The End of Evil: Process Eschatology in Historical Context*, she calls God eternal and everlasting, unlike the rest of reality, in the sense that God is “eternal in the one aim derived from the primordial nature toward a vision of Peace, including harmony, zest, and beauty; and everlasting in the concrete manifestation of this aim through the occasions of the world as they are prehended into the divine nature.”¹⁶⁹ This is to say that unlike the finite occasions of the world that are perpetually perishing, God’s ultimate vision is unchanging and God’s presence is one of continual concrescence with the world. Suchocki clearly considers God to be a metaphysically unique occasion in process philosophy, the only occasion that operates from a reversal of poles, allowing God to move from eternal primordial satisfaction to the incorporation of all things in the everlasting divine concrescence.

In Faber’s exploration of process theology, the unique otherness of God is manifest. Faber points out that the process understanding of God is one that does not fit nicely within the process system even as it completes the system, writing that “one can easily show that the concept of God in Whitehead’s organic philosophy is an *open* concept resistant to any and all

¹⁶⁶ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 205.

¹⁶⁷ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 228.

¹⁶⁸ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 253.

¹⁶⁹ Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, *The End of Evil: Process Eschatology in Historical Context* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 105.

classification, exhibiting instead almost system-destructive tendencies. In Whitehead's cosmology, God is (measured against the categories of that cosmology) not a principle at all, nor a category, nor an event (in the usual sense)."¹⁷⁰ Like Suchocki, Faber also points to the reversal of poles in God as a unique feature of the divine, with four primary results for God: (1) "God's inexhaustible process must be unlimited – 'everlasting concrescence,'"¹⁷¹ (2) God can "perceive the world in a *real* fashion beyond perspectival limitations, that is, to perceive the world *really* (as it is) and to redeem it *ideally* (as it could be),"¹⁷² (3) "the divine process takes as its point of departure *from its primordial satisfaction* in 'beginning' to develop its own concrescence. That is, God thus does not 'need' any world for God's concrescence,"¹⁷³ and (4) "God's reverse process is 'at the beginning' not only subjectively self-creative, but also *superjectively efficacious*, meaning that God is the creator of the world in the *most primordial* sense."¹⁷⁴ Through these consequences of the reversal of poles, God is made further unique when compared to any other event in the world.

But, for Faber, God is unique not just through the reversal of poles wherein the order of the world process is inverted, but also through complete otherness from the world process.

Differentiating his stance from Suchocki's reversal of poles, Faber claims that

"Whitehead's radical statement includes that God's concrescence and superjectivity not just happen *in reverse order*, but *in complete otherness* (although in intimate relation) to the world's process. This is the thesis: the *complete inversion* of the processes *in every respect* may not appear prior to the recognition that they *coincide* in God. This is the 'conversion' of the processes: the radical inversion of God's process means the *non-difference* of what differs in creation."¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁰ Faber, *God as Poet*, 146-147.

¹⁷¹ Faber, *God as Poet*, 149.

¹⁷² Faber, *God as Poet*, 149.

¹⁷³ Faber, *God as Poet*, 150.

¹⁷⁴ Faber, *God as Poet*, 150.

¹⁷⁵ Faber, "God's Advent/ure: The End of Evil and the Origin of Time," in Bracken, *World without End*, 105.

The consequence of this complete inversion is that “God’s primordial superjectivity reveals what we seek: the non-difference of time and everlastingness because of the *non-difference* of God’s primordial and consequent nature – a non-difference that *originates* the process of *difference* in God and, based on the difference of God’s natures, that of creation and salvation of the world.”¹⁷⁶ Through God’s inversion of processes, Faber sees God not only as a uniquely structured entity, but also as the origin of difference within the non-difference that is God. God is unique for Faber in that God resists all attempts at classification, operating differently than any other condescending occasion in reality in a complete inversion of the world process, the origin of difference within non-difference.

Bracken also addresses some ways in which God is unique in the process worldview. In *World without End* he writes that “the three divine persons are ontologically independent of the world of creation; they do not require an ongoing relationship either with this world or with any other world in order to exist as a divine community,” since the world “takes its rise and continues to exist within the divine matrix or structured field of activity proper to the three divine persons.”¹⁷⁷ In *The Many in the One*, God’s uniqueness shows up through Bracken’s similar claim that even with his field-oriented approach to the trinitarian God he does not deny that “God is necessary to the world in a way that the world is not necessary to God. For, even within a radically communitarian understanding of the God-world relationship, the world shares in the divine communitarian life only through the gracious free decision of the divine persons.”¹⁷⁸ God is thus still given a form of ontological priority. And in *Society and Spirit*, he claims that “the extensive continuum and Creativity together co-constitute the divine nature.”¹⁷⁹ In Bracken’s

¹⁷⁶ Faber, “God’s Advent/ure,” 105.

¹⁷⁷ Bracken, “Subjective Immortality,” 86.

¹⁷⁸ Bracken, *One in the Many*, 103.

¹⁷⁹ Bracken, *Society and Spirit*, 131.

understanding, God is uniquely constituted in part by the extensive continuum and Creativity itself. Overall, Bracken's view on the uniqueness of God is that through his trinitarian field of activity understanding of God, God does not require the world's existence, with the world existing through participation in God, who is the extensive continuum and Creativity.

Donna Bowman, in her analysis of the process understanding of election, sees God as unique in the process worldview. Although Bowman, like Case-Winters, has also written extensively on Karl Barth in the Reformed tradition, the process elements of her work will receive attention in this chapter. She does not see God's and the world's powers and influence on one another as entirely equal since "God alone among entities provides God's own initial aim, and so exists through God's own power alone, whereas all other entities exist through their own power and God's power."¹⁸⁰ Therefore she is saying that the God-world relationship is not completely symmetrical, even though it is a meaningful relationship in which each depends upon the other. She also writes that "it is God's power to accept and order that response as part of the divine plan that culminates and closes the process doctrine of election. The creature's response to God's initiative is not the last word; instead, God is the alpha and the omega of election."¹⁸¹ Although it is true that the world's power to self-determine (within certain bounds) has an influence on God by God's reception of the world in the consequent nature, Bowman is here pointing out how this can be understood as a function of God's power rather than the world's, a power in which "creatures are allowed to create themselves in whatever image they desire. This is the power God has graciously fostered in creatures. But God's power takes the creature's decision and purifies it in God's self, by including the actuality of the creature in the divine

¹⁸⁰ Donna Bowman, *The Divine Decision: A Process Doctrine of Election* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 124.

¹⁸¹ Bowman, 192-193.

consequent nature.”¹⁸² Although God is influenced by the freedom of the world, for Bowman it is only through God’s power that the world is transformed and received into the divine nature. Bowman sees God as unique by the fact that God alone provides God’s own initial aim, and only through God’s own power is the world moved into God’s consequent nature.

Case-Winters’s treatment of divine power illustrates God’s uniqueness. Highlighted here is the fact that she retains the term omnipotence for God, which automatically separates God from the rest of reality. Although she sees God’s power as the same kind of power that all of creation has, she still attaches ‘omni’ to God’s power. Case-Winters writes that “this constructive proposal will begin with Hartshorne’s stated definition of power as ‘the capacity to be influenced and to influence.’ Attaching the qualifier ‘omni’ to this meaning results in a definition of omnipotence as ‘the capacity to be influenced by *all* and to influence *all*.’”¹⁸³ Even though the mode of God’s power is thus of the same mode as the occasions of the world’s power (power in the mode of persuasion and influence), the degree of power is radically different, making God have a unique form of power. Through Case-Winters’s analysis of God’s power, God can be seen as unique in that God’s omnipotence is a degree of power greater than any exhibited by the rest of reality, even if it is still the same kind of power in the mode of influence and persuasion.

Although not necessarily representative of the wider process tradition, these sources point to an undercurrent that emphasizes the metaphysical uniqueness and otherness of God. The understanding of God’s uniqueness in process thought is that God is indeed a qualitatively different kind of entity from the rest of reality. Whitehead sees God as the poet of the world, creating the possibility of novelty in the world as God alone everlastingly moves from the mental pole to the physical pole. Hartshorne’s God is the only entity who is defined by universal

¹⁸² Bowman, 208-209.

¹⁸³ Anna Case-Winters, *God's Power: Traditional Understandings and Contemporary Challenges* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990), 211.

categories, who is fully absolute while fully relative, and who is necessary. Cobb sees God's uniqueness through God's all-inclusive standpoint in reality, from which God is the source of life and novelty. For Suchocki, God is unique through God's reversal of poles, giving God eternal satisfaction and the ability to bring all things into the everlasting divine concrescence. Faber understands God as structured differently from the rest of reality through the inversion of processes, not truly fitting any classification within the system. Bracken understands God as being the interrelated three divine persons in a common field of activity, whose nature is the extensive continuum and Creativity itself, meaning that God does not require the world and that the world exists through participation in God. Bowman views God as the alpha and the omega, in that God provides God's own initial aim and is the agent moving the world into the consequent nature. And Case-Winters claims God is omnipotent, having a greater degree of persuasive power than anything else. The overall uniqueness of God in these process thinkers is such that God is the only everlasting entity exhibiting a reversal of poles and inversion of processes, the all-inclusive, absolute-yet-relative necessity out of whom the world concresces.

Throughout the vast majority of these explorations into process thought, the lens being looked through has been a Christian one. But process thought opens the door to interreligious dialogue in powerful ways often not achievable using other philosophical systems. This is because process thought itself is not inherently Christian, and because it seeks to account for every experience of humanity, including all religions. Even in Whitehead's early work, *Science and the Modern World*, he states that the God of whom he writes in his philosophy "has been named respectively, Jehovah, Allah, Brahma, Father in Heaven, Order of Heaven, First Cause, Supreme Being, Chance. Each name corresponds to a system of thought derived from the

experiences of those who have used it.”¹⁸⁴ If all religious experiences constitute part of the scheme of process thought, then each religion is a legitimate interpretation of the experiences of that religion’s practitioners. Many theologians have seen the potential for promising interreligious dialogue in process thought.

One of the process theologians on the forefront of interreligious dialogue has been Cobb. In *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, he claims that Whitehead’s process philosophy provides a meaningful setting for interreligious dialogue and transformation, since “there are indications that persons from other traditions, especially Asian ones, find Whitehead’s conceptuality fruitful for the nonreductionist interpretation of their worlds of thought and experience.”¹⁸⁵ He sees that interreligious transformation can be of great help to Christianity, writing that “Christianity may be saved through its interior acceptance of pluralism and its creative transformation through openness to other traditions,”¹⁸⁶ even as Christ guides Christians towards the transformational encounters with other traditions, such that “when Christ is known as this process of creative transformation and when faith is wholeheartedly directed to him, pluralism can be inwardly appropriated without relativism.”¹⁸⁷ Cobb makes Christ bigger than Christianity, since the creative transformation that Christians term Christ “points to a reality that exists whether we recognize it or not, but it points to this reality as experienced and known in Christian history,”¹⁸⁸ leaving open the possibility for a plurality in which there is “a full recognition of the variety of structures of existence among which that of Jesus is one and that of Gautama, for example, is another. Only then can an account of Jesus as distinctively incarnating God leave open the question of the relative importance of that event in comparison with Gautama’s

¹⁸⁴ Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, 179.

¹⁸⁵ Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, 27.

¹⁸⁶ Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, 181.

¹⁸⁷ Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, 60.

¹⁸⁸ Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, 80.

enlightenment,”¹⁸⁹ or the major figures and claims of other traditions. What Christ signifies in process thought is not bound by any tradition or any person, even Jesus. In Cobb’s view Christ, the Logos, is bigger than Christianity and through pluralism can work creatively to transform and save Christianity, as other traditions are likewise transformed by the dialogue.

A concrete example of interreligious dialogue in which Cobb participated is *The Emptying God: A Buddhist-Jewish-Christian Conversation*, edited by Cobb and Christopher Ives, in which participants responded to a text of Masao Abe’s. Abe echoes some of Cobb’s earlier thoughts regarding interreligious dialogue, writing that “it is my conviction (shared particularly with John Cobb and others) that Buddhist-Christian-Jewish dialogue should go beyond the stage of promoting mutual understanding between the two religions and must aim at mutual transformation.”¹⁹⁰ Abe, like Cobb, encourages an interreligious dialogue that will transform its participants. The contributors to *The Emptying God* see interreligious dialogue as inherently transformative for its participants, with process thought providing a helpful, albeit imperfect, framework for the dialogue.

In Cobb’s recent *Jesus’ Abba*, he devotes a chapter to interreligious dialogue. In it, he believes that his understanding of God (Abba), which is guided by process thought, will be beneficial for what he calls deep pluralism, summarized as a pluralism “in which the deepest convictions of all are not such as to require the rejection of the deepest convictions of others.”¹⁹¹ Here, Cobb is developing a form of pluralism in which he explicitly disagrees “with those who suppose that our traditions are all paths up the same mountain or multiple ways of expressing the same truths. In some instances this may be correct, but anticipating this usually leads to failure to

¹⁸⁹ Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, 169.

¹⁹⁰ Masao Abe, “A Rejoinder,” in *The Emptying God: A Buddhist-Jewish-Christian Conversation*, ed. John B. Cobb, Jr. and Christopher Ives (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990), 158.

¹⁹¹ Cobb, *Jesus’ Abba*, 112.

hear much of what is being said.”¹⁹² This, then, is the kind of dialogue that Cobb hopes is possible with his process-guided understanding of God. In this work, Cobb understands interreligious dialogue in a process framework to be the belief that the deepest commitments of participants in interreligious dialogue, such as Cobb’s belief in Abba, can be held alongside every other participant’s deepest commitments and beliefs.

Although there are many process theologians with an interreligious focus, Cobb will be taken as a representative of the whole, given his influence on other process theologians and his significant interreligious experience. Through him, it can be seen that process theology approaches interreligious dialogue as a required theological task that will lead to mutual transformation. Cobb’s earlier works include this through their approach to interreligious dialogue in which all participants will be creatively transformed by what Christianity understands to be Christ or the Logos. In *The Emptying God*, process thought is a positive framework for interreligious dialogue because it encourages the mutual transformation of participants and provides a fertile ground of connections between traditions, even though it is not without its own complications. In Cobb’s later work *Jesus’ Abba*, interreligious dialogue is seen as deep pluralism, in which the deepest beliefs of traditions are capable of being held alongside one another. Process theology offers a promising resource for interreligious dialogue since it encourages mutually transformative dialogue between religious traditions even while providing a space for multiple religious beliefs to be held in deep pluralism.

This chapter has delved into the tradition of process thought in order to examine the salvific movements of God and the world toward and within one another. In this sense, it forms a process soteriology. God’s movements into the world, found especially in the primordial nature, the lure toward novelty, and the consequent nature, which are seen, respectively, as ordered

¹⁹² Cobb, *Jesus’ Abba*, 113.

creativity for the world, God's meeting of every actual occasion, and God's bringing of the world into the divine self, are God's actions taken on behalf of the world as God moves toward the world in an interdependent and mutual relationship with the world. And the world's movements into God, seen particularly in novelty, the consequent nature, and Christ, understood, respectively, as the world's embodiment of the potentiality provided by God, the reception by God of the world, and the perfect embodiment of God's initial aims, are the world's reaction to God and movement into God's very self. But God is metaphysically unique in these soteriological movements because God alone is everlasting, provides God's own initial aims, and exhibits a reversal of poles and inversion of processes.

It has been seen through this examination and analysis of the concepts of process theology that God's salvific actions towards the world, and the world's salvific actions towards God, are an interrelated and ongoing cycle, even though God has a unique place within that cycle. The primordial nature of God is the realm of possibility, ordered for every occasion to present it with a relevant initial aim in order to lure each occasion into the best possible future for itself, God, and all of reality. The lure toward novelty is the initial aim or desire that brings about novelty in the world through the primordial nature of God providing the best possibilities for each occasion. Sin is acts or intentions of violence and ill-being against particular aspects of the world, and by the logical extension of interrelatedness against all of reality. Novelty is the incarnation of creativity as the radically new emerges in occasions. The divine consequent nature is the transformation and reception of every experience of the world in its synthetic unification as it is felt by God, allowing God both to save the world and to present the best possible initial aims to the world. Process Christology sees Christ as the revelation of God, representing God's love dwelling in the world through the incarnation of creative transformation, seen particularly

emphasized in Jesus of Nazareth. The mutuality of God and the world is a relationship of profound interdependence, wherein God requires the world and the world requires God, each in some way co-creating the other as part of a larger whole. The uniqueness of God is that God is the only everlasting entity exhibiting a reversal of poles and inversion of processes, the all-inclusive, absolute-yet-relative necessity out of whom the future of the world concretes. Taken together, these process concepts all illustrate the salvific movements undertaken by both God and by the world as they exist in their interdependent relationship with one another. Process theology understands God to be a unique participant within this soteriological dance, but one that would not, and could not, exist without all of the non-divine partners comprising the world's side of the soteriological dance of movements.

Chapter Two

God's Free Choice: The Cycle of Soteriology in Reformed Theology

The Reformed tradition of Christianity is one of the many theological and ecclesiastic traditions with its roots in the Reformation of the sixteenth century. Since its beginnings, the Reformed tradition has always been a theological perspective growing out of a chorus of voices. Some of those voices have spoken louder than others, but there has always been a plurality of theological ideas all under the umbrella of Reformed theology. As will be seen, of course, there are certain theological themes and similarities present in most or all of the works of Reformed theologians, although it may not be as monolithic as it sometimes appears. Like in process thought, there are certain figures to whom the tradition looks as having a particularly strong insight into reality as it is understood by the Reformed tradition. But, perhaps unlike some process theologians, Reformed theologians are more willing to disagree with their foundational theologians. In its cycle of soteriology, the Reformed tradition has generally given all agency to God as God elects to be God for us, using divine sovereign providence to control the world's existence and destiny.

The Reformed tradition really has two different starting points in the work of two individuals: Huldrych (or Ulrich) Zwingli and John Calvin. But there are also many other less famous theologians during this period to which the Reformed tradition owes its roots, including Martin Bucer, William Farel, Heinrich Bullinger, Peter Martyr Vermigli, Theodore Beza, and John Knox. In *Exploring Protestant Traditions: An Invitation to Theological Hospitality*, W. David Buschart examines the Reformed tradition among several others, and suggests that "Calvin is correctly viewed as a 'second generation reformer,' continuing in the spirit of work by

people such as Luther, Zwingli, Bucer, who was one of Calvin's teachers, and William Farel, Calvin's predecessor at Geneva. As such, Calvin was in a position to provide 'positive solutions to problems which had only been defined' by his reformational predecessors."¹⁹³ One of the features that seems to define the Reformed tradition, or at least Calvinism, is the five points of Calvinism often abbreviated as TULIP, which were not actually codified until 1618-1619's Synod of Dordt, as Buschart points out in writing that at the Synod of Dordt "the so-called five points of Calvinism were corporately articulated for the first time: unconditional election, limited atonement, total depravity, irresistible grace, perseverance of the saints."¹⁹⁴ By far the most important theologian of the last century whom the Reformed tradition claims within their tradition is Karl Barth. Buschart makes this connection between the Reformed tradition and the neoorthodoxy of Barth clear by claiming that "neoorthodoxy is an important part of the story of Reformed theology in the middle of the twentieth century," with "nearly all of its early exponents, including major figures such as Karl Barth (1886-1968) and Emil Brunner (1889-1966)" coming from denominations with Reformed confessions and theological emphases.¹⁹⁵

From within the Reformed tradition, Shirley Guthrie illustrates the historical and theological variety within the Reformed family by pointing out that "there is no one authoritative statement of faith to which all Reformed churches subscribe. There are many different statements. They all bear a common family resemblance, but they differ from each other in emphasis, in the spirit in which they are written, and sometimes in theological content."¹⁹⁶ In fact, Guthrie claims that one of the unique features of the Reformed tradition is the particular way in which it uses confessions and creeds, writing that "confessional statements do have

¹⁹³ Buschart, 86-87.

¹⁹⁴ Buschart, 90.

¹⁹⁵ Buschart, 95.

¹⁹⁶ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 17.

authority for Reformed Christians, and there is a remarkable consistency in the fundamental content of their many confessions. But for them all creeds and confessions have only a *provisional, temporary, relative* authority and are therefore subject to revision and correction.”¹⁹⁷

This means that although the history of the Reformed tradition must still be kept in mind as a guide, for Guthrie the task of a present-day Reformed theologian is “to ask: ‘What is the living God we know in Christ and in the Bible doing and saying in *our* time, *here* and *now*, where *we* have to think and live as Christians?’”¹⁹⁸ With such a diversity of theologians and confessions, it is necessary to explore what, then, is meant by Reformed theology.

These thinkers all have certain commonalities in their theologies that unite them all within the Reformed tradition. In attempting to summarize the core of the Reformed tradition’s theology, Buschart highlights several characteristic emphases of the Reformed tradition, including that “it is marked by a pervasive focus upon the trinitarian God, particularly his sovereignty and salvific work on behalf of humankind,” and that “Reformed theology is soteriologically oriented. Although the so-called TULIP, or ‘five points of Calvinism’ does not in itself constitute either the core or a summary of Reformed theology, it is indicative of the emphasis on God’s gracious redemption that pervades Reformed thought.”¹⁹⁹

Scripture is of vital importance for Reformed theologians, as Buschart makes clear in writing that “a genuinely Reformed method of theology is one in which scripture is the uniquely supreme source and authority, for scripture provides as no other source can the divine self-revelation of God.”²⁰⁰ As far as the use of tradition by Reformed theology, the Reformed tradition does use confessions, but their stances on these confessions vary, as Buschart relates:

¹⁹⁷ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 25.

¹⁹⁸ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 18.

¹⁹⁹ Buschart, 103.

²⁰⁰ Buschart, 99.

the “circumstantial character of confessions means that in some Reformed circles they are open to being” changed or abandoned, while “in other Reformed contexts there is a greater confidence in the abiding truthfulness and accuracy of the affirmations in classical confessional documents.”²⁰¹ Overall, this results in a viewpoint that “like the church itself, Reformed theology is *reformata et semper reformanda*,” reformed and always being reformed.²⁰² The other two usually discussed sources for theology, reason and experience, have very different places in the Reformed tradition, according to Buschart: “the Reformed tradition also manifests an enthusiastic yet qualified role for reason in theology. The life of the mind has always been highly regarded in the Reformed tradition;”²⁰³ yet when it comes to experience, “by and large, the Reformed tradition has rejected the notion that experience constitutes a source or guiding norm for theology.”²⁰⁴

From within the Reformed tradition, Guthrie identifies several particular emphases that all Reformed creeds and confessions have in common: “all acknowledge the unique authority of Scripture. All emphasize God’s sovereign claim on both our personal lives and corporate life in church and society. All emphasize the inseparable connection between the justifying and the sanctifying grace of God.”²⁰⁵ But he also highlights the differences that can be found within these same creeds and confessions, writing that “they differ, for instance, in their understanding of predestination, or election (a doctrine central to them all).”²⁰⁶

²⁰¹ Buschart, 100.

²⁰² Buschart, 101.

²⁰³ Buschart, 101.

²⁰⁴ Buschart, 101.

²⁰⁵ Guthrie, *Always Being Reformed*, 15.

²⁰⁶ Guthrie, *Always Being Reformed*, 15.

In his essay in *Major Themes in the Reformed Tradition*, John H. Leith highlights “nine identifiable motifs” that “have significantly shaped the Reformed style of being a Christian.”²⁰⁷ Among these motifs are that “popular estimates of the Reformed tradition have always identified it with the sovereignty of God and with predestination. This popular estimate has good basis in fact.”²⁰⁸ He also differentiates Reformed from Lutheran theology by writing that “Calvinism is distinguished from Lutheranism by its emphasis on the majesty of God.”²⁰⁹ And Leith sees Reformed theologians as proclaiming that “God is working out a divine purpose in human history.”²¹⁰

In writing on the stance of Reformed theology towards natural theology in *Major Themes in the Reformed Tradition*, Alvin C. Plantinga writes that “for the most part the Reformed attitude has ranged from indifference, through suspicion and hostility, to outright accusations of blasphemy.”²¹¹ When analyzing the Reformed rejection of the efforts of natural theology, Plantinga concludes that Reformed theologians object to natural theology “as a rejection of classical foundationalism. As Reformed thinkers see things, being self-evident, or incorrigible, or evident to the senses is not a necessary condition of proper basicity. They go on to add that belief in God is properly basic.”²¹² The Reformed tradition, then, appears to be centered on the sovereign God as the sole theme of theology. Reformed theologians may differ in their individual understandings of God, but overall they agree on the sovereignty and primacy of God in creation, governance, election, and salvation.

²⁰⁷ John H. Leith, “The Ethos of the Reformed Tradition,” in *Major Themes in the Reformed Tradition*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1992), 5.

²⁰⁸ Leith, 5.

²⁰⁹ Leith, 8.

²¹⁰ Leith, 8.

²¹¹ Alvin C. Plantinga, “The Reformed Objection to Natural Theology,” in McKim, *Major Themes*, 66.

²¹² Plantinga, 75.

Calvin, the reformer at Geneva in the early- to mid-sixteenth century, is often considered the father of Reformed theology. More systematic and acerbic than Zwingli, Calvin led the church in Geneva in its reformation, leaving a legacy of works that would influence many future theologians. In his work, he highlighted the sovereignty of God and fought against any practices that added anything to Christianity that was not found in scripture. While there were indeed many theological voices from the Reformation era that helped to shape what eventually became the Reformed tradition, it is true that many theologians in the Reformed tradition look back to Calvin and build upon his theology. He is thus a major foundational theological figure for the Reformed tradition, and one who must be addressed.

The core of Calvin's theology is the interpretation of scripture, with a particular focus on God's sovereign omnipotence. Calvin himself, in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, claims that the church, when it comes to theology, only has "authority to lay down articles of faith, and authority to explain them."²¹³ But he cautions that this authority of the church is not "the power to set up a new doctrine," but only "in interpreting Scripture."²¹⁴ Anna Case-Winters, in *God's Power: Traditional Understandings and Contemporary Challenges*, claims that Calvin's usual method of theology was "rational argument," but that in difficult areas his final recourse was "to retreat behind an impregnable wall of authority. He appealed to scripture, especially the Pauline corpus, and to Augustine."²¹⁵ She also highlights the centrality of omnipotence for Calvin's concept of God, writing that "for Calvin, omnipotence is not one attribute alongside other attributes of God. Belief in the sovereignty of God undergirds and pervades all of Calvin's thinking and speaking about God. Nor is omnipotence some abstract principle applied to God;

²¹³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), IV.viii.1.

²¹⁴ Calvin, IV.ix.13.

²¹⁵ Case-Winters, *God's Power*, 78.

God *is* first and foremost the sovereign God,”²¹⁶ but she also rightly notes that despite Calvin claiming merely to be interpreting scripture, “Calvin did not simply *find* in scripture his particular perspective on omnipotence; in a sense he *brought it to* scripture.”²¹⁷ The sovereign omnipotence of God is at the heart of Calvin’s thought, around which the rest of his theology revolves. Other main features of Calvin’s theology, particularly as they have been emphasized by later Calvinists, include Calvin’s understanding of election as related to double predestination.

Although Calvin may be a foundational figure for the Reformed tradition, he will not be the primary representative of traditional Reformed theology in this project. Rather, that place will be taken by Barth and his modification of Calvin’s theology. The Swiss theologian lived 1886-1968 and was briefly a pastor before becoming a theology professor. Barth studied theology in Berne, Berlin, Tübingen, and Marburg from 1904-1909, where he originally became a follower of Schleiermacher’s theology.²¹⁸ Although it is the *Church Dogmatics* that would become his *magnum opus*, Barth first gained attention in the theological world for his *Epistle to the Romans* commentary, which “sounded like a trumpet throughout the theological world to friend and foe alike,”²¹⁹ published first in 1919, with a second completely rewritten version in 1922. The first edition of *Epistle to the Romans* earned him the chair of Reformed Theology at Göttingen in 1921, at which time he seriously began “to train himself in Reformed theology, a tradition which, not without some radical reconstructions, became his theological home.”²²⁰ Looking back on his theological career in 1963, he summarized it as “five years as a student, twelve years as a preacher, and subsequent forty years as a professor.”²²¹ He is often considered

²¹⁶ Case-Winters, *God’s Power*, 81.

²¹⁷ Case-Winters, *God’s Power*, 81.

²¹⁸ Clifford Green, “Introduction: Karl Barth’s Life and Theology,” in Green, *Theologian of Freedom*, 13.

²¹⁹ Green, “Introduction,” 16.

²²⁰ Green, “Introduction,” 18.

²²¹ Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*, trans. Grover Foley (1963; repr., Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1979), xiii.

the founder of neo-orthodoxy, and is claimed by Reformed theologians as representing a form of their theology.

Barth's theology is centered on the freedom and love of God. Jesus Christ is the key to all of Barth's theology, serving to reveal who God has chosen to be, and who humanity truly is in response to God. In *Fate and Idea in Theology*, Barth writes that theology "has God as its object but only to the extent that, as Thomas Aquinas once profoundly remarked, theology has God as its subject, even if that subject is most highly hidden."²²² Later, in Barth's "The Humanity of God," he continues to pursue the same idea of theology, writing that "theology can think and speak only in view of Jesus Christ, and by starting out from him."²²³ The centrality of Christ as the sole revelation of theological truth remains important for Barth, as it shows up still in his "Philosophy and Theology" essay, wherein he writes that for the theologian, "Jesus Christ is the one whole Truth, through whom the path of his thought and speech has been shown to him just as strictly as the philosophical path has been cut off."²²⁴ Later, in what Barth referred to as his swan song, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*, Barth defines evangelical theology by writing that wherever God "becomes the object of human science, both its source and its norm, there is *evangelical* theology."²²⁵ He goes on to claim that "theology stands and falls with the Word of God, for the Word of God precedes all theological words by creating, arousing, and challenging them. Should theology wish to be more or less or anything other than action in response that Word, its thinking and speaking would be empty, meaningless, and futile."²²⁶ In Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, he finds theology to be its own epistemological foundation, since

²²² Karl Barth, "Fate and Idea in Theology," trans. George Hunsinger, in *The Way of Theology in Karl Barth: Essays and Comments*, ed. H. Martin Rumscheidt (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 1986), 27.

²²³ Barth, "Humanity of God," 59.

²²⁴ Karl Barth, "Philosophy and Theology," in Rumscheidt, 89.

²²⁵ Barth, *Evangelical Theology*, 6.

²²⁶ Barth, *Evangelical Theology*, 17.

“the reality of the Word of God in all its three forms is grounded only in itself.”²²⁷ Despite its epistemological foundation within itself, Barth cautions that all theology must be aware of the mystery of its subject/object: “of God it is impossible to speak, because He is neither a natural nor a spiritual object. If we speak of Him, we are no longer speaking of Him.”²²⁸ For Barth’s theology, Christ is the only true subject and object of theology.

In opposition to natural theology, Barth writes in *The First Commandment as an Axiom of Theology* that theology “should take its leave of each and every natural theology and dare, in that narrow isolation, to cling solely to the god who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ. Why? Because that and only that has been commanded of it. Because everything else is arbitrariness which does not lead to, but leads away from, that god.”²²⁹ And in “No!” Barth vehemently denies the appropriateness of natural theology for theologians, summarizing natural theology as “every (positive or negative) *formulation of a system* which claims to be theological, *i.e.* to interpret divine revelation, whose *subject*, however, differs fundamentally from the revelation in Jesus Christ and whose *method* therefore differs equally from the exposition of Holy Scripture,”²³⁰ and writing that “if one occupies oneself with real theology one can pass by so-called natural theology only as one would pass by an abyss into which it is inadvisable to step if one does not want to fall.”²³¹ Barth is clearly opposed to any form of ‘theology’ that does not have the revelation of God in Jesus Christ as its sole foundation.

Barth sees theology and philosophy as having a complicated relationship. For him, they were movements of thought that work in opposite directions, yet not without their uses for one

²²⁷ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 1, part 1, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrence, English trans (New York: T. & T. Clark, 1975), I/1, 187.

²²⁸ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, 750.

²²⁹ Karl Barth, “The First Commandment as an Axiom of Theology,” in Rumscheidt, 77.

²³⁰ Emil Brunner and Karl Barth, *Natural Theology: Comprising “Nature and Grace” by Professor Dr. Emil Brunner and the reply “No!” by Dr. Karl Barth*, trans. Peter Fraenkel (1946; repr., Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 74-75.

²³¹ Brunner and Barth, 75.

another. In *Fate and Idea in Theology*, Barth sees philosophy as clearly having a positive value for theology, since he argues against dismissing forms of theology merely for containing philosophical insights, writing that “it is lamentable that in the history of theology (including the present), it has been imagined again and again that one’s opponent can be dismissed simply by pointing to a realist or idealist philosopher who stands in the wings.”²³²

In his “Philosophy and Theology” essay, Barth makes a clear distinction in the methodology and goals that he sees between theology and philosophy, writing that from the standpoint of the theologian “the movement from above to below which for him is unconditional and primary is also as such not unfamiliar to the philosopher. But he intends to see, that the movement governing and characterizing the whole, in the thought and speech of the philosopher is honestly not primary, but is secondary.”²³³ Barth also considers the relationship between theology and philosophy in the *Church Dogmatics*. He goes so far as to give a theological role for philosophy, writing that “the use of the manner of thought we bring with us in reflecting upon what Scripture has to say can have only the fundamental character of an essay, and the use of our philosophy for this end can have only the fundamental character of a hypothesis.”²³⁴ Taking these insights together, Barth saw the relationship between theology and philosophy as one in which philosophy works in an opposite direction from theology, but acknowledged that theology without philosophy is impossible.

Calvin’s influence can be seen within Barth’s theology. His use of Calvin is apparent in many ways. Barth himself lectured on Calvin early in his career and became very familiar with the man and his theology, with those lectures from 1922 compiled in *The Theology of John Calvin*, wherein he reflects on a central theme of Calvin’s that will later become a central focus

²³² Barth, “Fate and Idea,” 44-45.

²³³ Barth, “Philosophy and Theology,” 86.

²³⁴ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, 730.

for Barth as well: “Christ is from the first the key with which he unlocks the whole.”²³⁵ In the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth makes explicit his reliance on Calvin and the Reformed tradition by writing that “Church dogmatics is necessarily Reformed dogmatics. By this we mean the dogmatics of the particular Church which was purified and reconstituted by the work of Calvin and the confession which sealed his testimony.”²³⁶ Clearly, Barth saw Calvin as representative of the proper way of doing theology, but usable only as a guide pointing back toward scripture and not as a source of revelation in his own right.

In *The Vigilant God: Providence in the Thought of Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, and Barth*, Horton Davies recognizes the significant differences between Barth and Calvin, but highlights several important commonalities: (1) “for Barth, as some believe also for Calvin, while the Bible must play a dominant role in theology, it is not itself revelation,”²³⁷ (2) “like Barth, Calvin has little interest in natural theology,”²³⁸ and (3) “for Calvin, as for Barth, dogmatics – the exposition of Biblical theology systematically – is the best form of apologetics (defending the faith), or even of eristics (confuting the opposition).”²³⁹ David Gibson, in his *Reading the Decree: Exegesis, Election and Christology in Calvin and Barth*, agrees that Calvin had a profound influence on Barth, stating that Barth was particularly indebted to Calvin in the areas of Christology and election in the following ways: (1) “Barth’s work as a biblical interpreter is directly shaped by his encounter with Calvin as a biblical interpreter,”²⁴⁰ and (2) “Barth’s work as a dogmatic theologian was, from the earliest days of his academic career, both

²³⁵ Karl Barth, *The Theology of John Calvin*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 164.

²³⁶ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, 831.

²³⁷ Horton Davies, *The Vigilant God: Providence in the Thought of Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, and Barth* (New York: P. Lang, 1992), 128.

²³⁸ Davies, 129.

²³⁹ Davies, 130.

²⁴⁰ David Gibson, *Reading the Decree: Exegesis, Election and Christology in Calvin and Barth* (London: T & T Clark, 2009), 18.

modulated by Calvin's understanding of election and worked out in disagreement with it."²⁴¹

Case-Winters highlights two ways in which Barth uses Calvin or has similar emphases regarding God's power: (1) "Barth continues and intensifies the personal model we find in Calvin,"²⁴² and (2) "as it was in the compatibilism of Calvin, so it is in Barth's compatibilism: Barth is seeking to exclude both indeterminism and determinism."²⁴³ Together, these three authors all see Barth as continuing Calvin's work, being in general agreement with it even as Barth adapted and built on Calvin.

One of the more recent successors of Barth within the Reformed tradition is Guthrie, whose adaptation of Barth will be the primary dialogue partner representing the Reformed tradition when it is brought into comparison with process thought. Just as Barth modified and updated Calvin, so Guthrie has rightly modified and updated Barth to help bring the Reformed tradition out of the shadow of its past, encouraging it to take steps into the pluralistic and postmodern world in which we live. While certainly not as prolific a writer with as much influence as Barth or Calvin, he represents a general shift in the Reformed tradition that has been occurring as the theologians of the past are interpreted for today. Guthrie studied at Princeton Theological Seminary with Paul Lehmann and at Basel with Barth.²⁴⁴ After this, he was a pastor in Texas for two years before going to teach at Columbia Theological Seminary.²⁴⁵ Donald McKim writes of Guthrie that "his influence throughout the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) was pervasive for scores of students who learned from him."²⁴⁶ Of his few written works, *Christian Doctrine* has seen widespread popularity in colleges, seminaries, and even churches for decades,

²⁴¹ Gibson, 19.

²⁴² Case-Winters, *God's Power*, 107.

²⁴³ Case-Winters, *God's Power*, 114.

²⁴⁴ Charles B. Cousar, "Tribute to Shirley C. Guthrie Jr." in Guthrie, *Always Being Reformed*, ix.

²⁴⁵ Cousar, x.

²⁴⁶ Donald K. McKim, "Publisher's Note," in Guthrie, *Always Being Reformed*, vii.

which Guthrie attributes to the work's successful fulfillment of "the hunger of lay church members and beginning theological students for instruction in the Christian faith written in a way that is accessible to them."²⁴⁷

Given the popularity of Guthrie's *Christian Doctrine*, his theology is important to understand as it has shaped many generations of leaders within the Reformed tradition in the United States. Guthrie defines theology as "*the quest for the ultimate truth about God, about ourselves, and about the world we live in.*"²⁴⁸ He clearly sees all topics as falling within the realm of theology. Guthrie has explicitly identified the theologians who have been most influential for him, particularly in the second edition of *Christian Doctrine*: "John Calvin, the confessional documents of Reformed churches, Karl Barth's update of the classical Reformed tradition, and others who stand generally in this theological line."²⁴⁹ But to this main theological thread he adds another source of theological insight that has proven to be influential for him: "the voices of black theologians such as American James Cone and South African Allan Boesak; feminist and 'womanist' theologians such as Rosemary Ruether, Sallie McFague, Letty Russel, and Jacquelyn Grant; and Latin American theologians such as Gustavo Gutiérrez, Jon Sobrino, Leonardo Boff, and Juan Luis Segundo."²⁵⁰

When doing Reformed theology, Guthrie encourages us to keep in mind that "to be a Reformed Christian is by definition to be constantly reforming in obedience to the living God in every new time and situation," and thus to always be ready to adapt one's theology to the new ways in which God is revealed in new contexts.²⁵¹ His theology is centered on making theological insights, particularly those of Barth, available and accessible to clergy and future

²⁴⁷ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, ix.

²⁴⁸ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 1.

²⁴⁹ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, x.

²⁵⁰ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, xii.

²⁵¹ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 351.

clergy so that it is more readily applicable to the contexts of today. Given this central focus, he also places great importance on incorporating the theological insights of other more recent voices than Barth, representing traditions like liberation theology and feminist or womanist theology that serve as a much-needed counterpart and potential corrective to Barth's theology.

Guthrie uses and builds upon Barth's theology, as can be expected given the fact that Guthrie was a student of Barth. Charles Cousar writes that "Barth profoundly shaped Shirley's theology," and that "Barth's affection for Shirley was typified in 1961, when Barth made his only trip to the United States and asked Shirley to translate for him."²⁵² Barth's focus on the sovereign freedom of God is very prevalent in Guthrie. George Stroup highlights Barth's influence on Guthrie in writing that "not surprisingly, Guthrie's understanding of God's freedom is indebted to Karl Barth, for whom God is first and foremost free within God's self."²⁵³

And Daniel Migliore, writing in *Many Voices, One God: Being Faithful in a Pluralistic World*, a text written in honor of Guthrie, claims that "for Guthrie, it is this living Word and not our orthodox or not-so-orthodox doctrines, ideas, traditions, philosophies, and experiences that constitutes the source and norm of Christian faith and life and that calls for thankful and obedient response," and that "Guthrie shares this conviction with his mentor, Karl Barth, whose magisterial christocentric reconstruction of Christian doctrine continues to be the principal formative influence on Guthrie's own work."²⁵⁴ But Guthrie is not always content merely to repeat Barth's theology, as he also transforms Barth's theology by bringing it into closer dialogue with other newer theological schools and contexts. Guthrie thus continues Barth's legacy of allowing the Reformed tradition to be reformed in new contexts, just as Barth

²⁵² Cousar, ix-x.

²⁵³ George W. Stroup, "God's Freedom from and for the World, in Guthrie, *Always Being Reformed*, 130-131.

²⁵⁴ Daniel L. Migliore, "Sin and Self-Loss: Karl Barth and the Feminist Critique of the Traditional Doctrines of Sin," in *Many Voices, One God: Being Faithful in a Pluralistic World*, ed. Walter Brueggemann and George W. Stroup (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 139.

continued Calvin's own reforming of the theology of the church. These three theologians, then, represent three influential theological figures within the Reformed tradition.

Divine sovereignty is one of the central themes of the Reformed tradition. Its use by these authors, particularly Barth, must be explored if it is to be understood in greater depth. The core of the concept as it is found within these theologians is that God is absolutely free. Only by being free from any external conditions or internal necessities is God truly able to love humanity and choose to be for creation. The overall understanding of divine sovereignty in the Reformed tradition leans towards seeing it as God's complete independence from all of creation, but that might not be entirely accurate once the theological concept is made more complex by examining the actual works of these theologians.

Going to some of the Reformed tradition's roots from which Barth and Guthrie grow, Calvin views God's sovereignty as God's existence above creation. In the *Institutes of Christian Religion*, he sees God as being unaffected by human actions, stating that "God did none of these things for his own sake, but arranged them all for the salvation of men."²⁵⁵ But he also writes of divine sovereignty that it gives God dominion over humanity and all things, claiming that "Scripture calls us to resign ourselves and all our possessions to the Lord's will, and to yield to him the desires of our hearts to be tamed and subjugated."²⁵⁶ Barth, in his *The Theology of John Calvin*, considers divine sovereignty to be the central doctrine for Calvin, stating that "the first feature of Calvin's concept of God is the thought of his divine sovereignty, which we also find, of course, in Luther, but not at any rate in the primary way in which it was at once for Calvin the basis of the relation between Lord and servant, the ethical relation between God and us."²⁵⁷

²⁵⁵ Calvin, II.xi.14.

²⁵⁶ Calvin, III.vii.8.

²⁵⁷ Barth, *Theology of John Calvin*, 119.

Calvin can be understood as claiming that divine sovereignty is God's simultaneous dominion over and independence from the events and peoples of the world.

Barth addresses divine sovereignty in the *Church Dogmatics* as the absolute freedom of God, claiming that "God is absolute, i.e., utterly independent of everything that is not He. God is, whether everything else is or is not, whether it is in this way or some other. If there is something other, it cannot precede God, it cannot place God in dependence upon itself, and it cannot limit God or change God."²⁵⁸ Barth heavily emphasizes God's freedom, in fact giving God alone true freedom by writing that "freedom in its positive and proper qualities means to be grounded in one's own being, to be determined and moved by oneself. This is the freedom of the divine life and love."²⁵⁹ Because God's love is connected to God's freedom, there is a self-limitation on God's sovereignty for Barth, since "God has limited Himself to be this God and no other, to be the love which is active and dwells with men at this point and in this way, in Jesus Christ. God has bound Himself to His own Son to be eternally true to His creation."²⁶⁰ In the lecture "The Humanity of God," Barth claims that "in his freedom he actually does not desire to be without humanity, but *with* us, and in the same freedom to be not against us but, regardless of and contrary to our desert, to be *for* us – he desires in fact to be humanity's partner and our omnipotent pitying Savior."²⁶¹ Overall, Barth's view of divine sovereignty is best understood as God's unconditional freedom, in which God has chosen to be for humanity and to love creation.

Guthrie expands on Barth's understanding of sovereignty, exploring it as God's freedom to love. He writes in *Christian Doctrine* that "we must speak first of the God who has come to us like a mother or a father. Then, in the light of that, we can understand what it means that this

²⁵⁸ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1, 308.

²⁵⁹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1, 301.

²⁶⁰ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1, 518.

²⁶¹ Barth, "Humanity of God," 56.

God is also a God of sovereign majesty ‘in heaven.’”²⁶² In other words, the doctrine of divine sovereignty cannot be considered apart from God’s choice to love creation. And in *Always Being Reformed: Faith for a Fragmented World*, Guthrie sees God’s sovereignty as good news of liberation. There, he says that “a genuinely biblical Christian – *Trinitarian*” understanding of sovereignty “is good news both for people who long for a God who cares enough to be present in the depths of their personal and collective suffering to share it, and for people who long for a God who is powerful enough to liberate them from every social, political, and ecclesiastical system that oppresses and dehumanizes.”²⁶³ In this text, he also follows Barth to claim that “God’s sovereign freedom is freedom to love – not freedom either to love or not love, to love some people but not others, or sometimes to love and at other times not to love. God’s freedom is God’s freedom *only* to love, *all* people, *always*.”²⁶⁴ Thus, for Guthrie, God’s sovereignty is God’s freedom to love all people in all times and places.

There are other Reformed voices that need to be drawn into the discussion of divine sovereignty. One such voice, which will also be used in the discussion of the other theological doctrines, is itself a collection of voices: *The Book of Confessions* of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). Given the prevalence of Presbyterianism as the most popular form of the Reformed tradition in the United States, this is an important document to include as it indicates what Presbyterians officially believe, and many of its documents are also shared with other churches of the Reformed tradition. In *The Book of Confessions*, the Westminster Confession of Faith addresses divine sovereignty as God’s absolute self-sufficient independence and lordship over all creation, since it claims God “is alone in and unto himself all-sufficient, not standing in need of any creatures which he hath made, nor deriving any glory from them, but only manifesting his

²⁶² Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 104.

²⁶³ Guthrie, *Always Being Reformed*, 42.

²⁶⁴ Guthrie, *Always Being Reformed*, 48.

own glory in, by, unto, and upon them; he is the alone foundation of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom, are all things; and hath most sovereign dominion over them.”²⁶⁵ And Benjamin Farley, in *Major Themes in the Reformed Tradition*, says that the Reformed tradition values sovereignty because it is the claim that “the God of the universe is without rival. Hence, whatever processes exist, whatever forms and laws there are, whatever powers and order there may be, all are willed, allowed, anticipated, bestowed, and conferred by God.”²⁶⁶ This means that God alone is God, the only being accompanying all of creation. These voices of the Reformed tradition combine to suggest an understanding of divine sovereignty that sees God as the absolutely independent lord of all creation who has chosen to accompany and rule everything in the universe.

Through the writings of these Reformed theologians, it can be seen that throughout its history the Reformed tradition has understood the concept of divine sovereignty to mean the absolute free lordship of God over creation. This can be seen in Calvin’s understanding of God’s independent dominion over the world. It is exhibited in Barth’s view of God’s absolute freedom to be for humanity. It is found in Guthrie’s work as God’s freedom to love all of creation. The other examined Reformed voices view it as God being the independent lord of the entire universe. The Reformed concept of divine sovereignty seems to combine two different attributes of God: God’s independent immutability and God’s omnipotent control of creation. This is because although God’s self-sufficient independence is the core of what is meant by divine sovereignty in the Reformed tradition, the concept of divine lordship is automatically included within it. For it is only by being a totally free and independent deity that God is able to exercise lordship over creation. The best way to understand what the Reformed tradition’s concept of

²⁶⁵ “The Westminster Confession of Faith,” in *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.): Part I, The Book of Confessions*, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (Louisville: Office of the General Assembly, 1999), 6.012.

²⁶⁶ Benjamin W. Farley, “The Providence of God in Reformed Perspective,” in McKim, *Major Themes*, 91.

divine sovereignty is truly getting at is to see sovereignty as the absolute self-sufficient freedom of God to love creation and to be for humanity.

Total depravity is one of the so-called five points of Calvinism, and as such is a major theme of the Reformed tradition. In essence, total depravity is the view that humanity has become totally corrupted by sin, so that humanity has lost its original nature and is unable to do anything good on its own. According to the Reformed perspective, it is only by being saved by Christ and filled by the Holy Spirit that humanity is able to turn to God and do God's will. Total depravity is in danger of being seen as an overly pessimistic view of humanity in which we are hopelessly lost, but that view is complicated by the actual writings of Reformed theologians.

Calvin sees total depravity as the completely fallen state of human nature that needs God's help. He even begins his *Institutes* by stressing humanity's fallen and corrupted nature, writing in his opening paragraph: "from feeling our own ignorance, vanity, poverty, infirmity, and – what is more – depravity and corruption, we recognize that the true light of wisdom, sound virtue, full abundance of every good, and purity of righteousness rest in the Lord alone."²⁶⁷ Calvin approaches total depravity through the concept of original sin, which he defines as "a hereditary depravity and corruption of our nature, diffused into all parts of the soul."²⁶⁸ Original sin is universal for all humanity, as Calvin notes that "all of us, who have descended from impure seed, are born infected with the contagion of sin. In fact, before we saw the light of this life we were soiled and spotted in God's sight."²⁶⁹ Through original sin and the resultant total depravity of humanity, humanity sins freely and yet also by necessity, as Calvin claims that "man, as he was corrupted by the Fall, sinned willingly, not unwillingly or by compulsion; by the most eager inclination of his heart, not by forced compulsion; by the prompting of his own lust,

²⁶⁷ Calvin, I.i.1.

²⁶⁸ Calvin, II.i.8.

²⁶⁹ Calvin, II.i.5.

not by compulsion from without. Yet so depraved is his nature that he can be moved or impelled only to evil.”²⁷⁰ Calvin can be understood as claiming that total depravity is the universal corruption of human nature by original sin, which prevents humanity from accomplishing anything good on its own.

In the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth understands humanity’s depravity as the inevitable and total prevalence of sin in fallen humanity, claiming that for an individual original sin is “the inevitability and totality of his existence as one already fallen in Adam.”²⁷¹ Through the person and work of Christ, humanity is able to see its fallen that Christ has overcome: as “the man who willed to be as God, himself lord, the judge of good and evil, his own helper,”²⁷² and as “the man who would not make use of his freedom, but was content with the low level of a self-enclosed being, thus being irremediably and radically and totally subject to his own stupidity, inhumanity, dissipation and anxiety, and delivered up to his own death.”²⁷³ These descriptions of humanity as fallen beings paint a clear picture of the total depravity of human nature.

Earlier, in his *Fate and Idea in Theology* essay, Barth claimed that “our will is perverse, fundamentally incapable of knowing God and of acting obediently toward him.”²⁷⁴ In this early text, then, he understands total depravity to be a stumbling block between humanity and God that can only be overcome from God’s side. Even earlier, in the 1922 edition of *Epistle to the Romans*, Barth identifies the sole commonality of all humanity as being total depravity before God, claiming that “our solidarity with others is alone adequately grounded, when with others – or apart from them, since we may not wait for them! – we stretch out beyond everything that we are and have, and behold the wholly problematical character of our present condition. All *fall*

²⁷⁰ Calvin, II.iii.5.

²⁷¹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, 189.

²⁷² Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/1, 358.

²⁷³ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/2, 378.

²⁷⁴ Barth, “Fate and Idea,” 41.

short of the glory of God.”²⁷⁵ Barth’s view of total depravity is best understood as the inevitable and total corruption of fallen humanity that prevents humanity from being obedient to God.

Guthrie adapts Barth’s theology to see total depravity as the corruption of a natural good in humanity. In *Christian Doctrine*, he expresses that “total depravity, when correctly understood, means that although both Christians *and* non-Christians can do much good, nothing we do is free from the corruption of sinful self-interest.”²⁷⁶ Even the good that is done by humanity is tainted by the corruption of fallen, sinful human nature. However, Guthrie places the corrupted nature of humanity within the greater good of creation, such as when he writes that “after the creation story comes the beginning of the long story (that still continues) of human sin and its consequences. But neither the Bible nor genuinely Christian theology says that God’s good creation has become a bad creation.”²⁷⁷ Further exploring the idea of humanity as a good of creation that has been corrupted, Guthrie claims that “the basic truth is not that we are sinners but that we are human beings created in God’s image. Sin distorts, twists, corrupts, and contradicts this truth, but it does not change us into something other than what God created us to be.”²⁷⁸ Therefore, for Guthrie total depravity is the corruption by sin of human nature, which is otherwise a good part of God’s good creation.

Other Reformed theologians throughout history have reinforced the Reformed view of total depravity. The Scots Confession of 1560, with Knox as lead writer, claims that in humanity “the image of God was utterly defaced in man, and he and his children became by nature hostile to God, slaves to Satan, and servants to sin.”²⁷⁹ This shows that total depravity can be understood historically as the turning in the Fall of humanity from God to sin, which has now become part of

²⁷⁵ Karl Barth, “Epistle to the Romans,” trans. Edwyn C. Hoskins, in Green, *Theologian of Freedom*, 134.

²⁷⁶ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 225.

²⁷⁷ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 158.

²⁷⁸ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 213.

²⁷⁹ G. D. Henderson, ed., “The Scots Confession,” trans. James Bullock, in Presbyterian, *Confessions*, 3.03.

human nature and can only be rectified by God's intervention. McKim also deals with total depravity, writing that it is "the view, characteristic in Reformed theology, that sinfulness pervades all areas of life or the totality of human existence."²⁸⁰ He thus sees it as the pervasive corruption of sin within all of humanity. These voices of the Reformed tradition combine to suggest an understanding of total depravity that sees humanity as totally enslaved to sin and lost without God's help.

The Reformed tradition, as seen in these theologians, has understood the concept of total depravity to mean the complete corruption of human nature by sin. Calvin views it as original sin's corruption of humanity, preventing the accomplishment of any good on its own. For Barth, it is the corruption of humanity, preventing obedience to God. Guthrie understands it as the sinful corruption of what is otherwise a good in human nature. McKim and the Scots Confession claim it is the enslavement of humanity to sin. Overall, the Reformed tradition understands total depravity to be original sin's corruption of the good of human nature, enslaving humanity to sin and preventing obedience to God.

The Reformed tradition also emphasizes divine providence, since providence is necessary for overcoming the total depravity of humanity. As it is used by Reformed theologians, providence is the fact that God is in control of anything and everything that occurs in the universe. God must be in control in order to be effective in accomplishing the reconciliation and salvation of creation. At times, Reformed theologians appear to have an extreme view of divine control approaching determinism, but that is not the case for most of them once their works are examined.

In the early Reformed tradition, Calvin saw divine providence as God's complete control and determination of everything in the universe. He claims that God has decided the divine plan

²⁸⁰ McKim, *Dictionary*, 284.

before time and now continues to follow that plan, writing that “we declare that not only heaven and earth and the inanimate creatures, but also the plans and intentions of men, are so governed by his providence that they are borne by it straight to their appointed end.”²⁸¹ All things within reality are determined by this will of God, as Calvin shares in claiming that “governing heaven and earth by his providence, he so regulates all things that nothing takes place without his deliberation.”²⁸² Elsewhere in the *Institutes*, Calvin makes it even clearer that there is nothing, not even the wind, that is not under God’s direct control: “I infer that no wind ever arises or increases except by God’s express command.”²⁸³ Calvin explains this determination of all things by God without blaming God for evils by using the example of the ruination of Job: “the Lord’s purpose is to exercise the patience of His servant by calamity; Satan endeavors to drive him to desperation; the Chaldeans strive to acquire gain from another’s property contrary to law and right. So great is the diversity of purpose that already strongly marks the deed. There is no less difference in the manner.”²⁸⁴ In this way, Calvin is still able to account for humans as secondary causes of their actions, differentiating between God’s good intentions and manner, and the evils of secondary causes.

Case-Winters, in *God’s Power*, defines Calvin’s doctrine of omnipotence as “the *effectual exercise of the divine personal will in accomplishing divine purposes*. It necessarily entails the ability to control events and creatures and the active use of that ability.”²⁸⁵ However, Case-Winters highlights that Calvin’s concept of God’s power is personal and particular, writing that “he saw direct intervention of a transcendent being whose active power continuously exerts

²⁸¹ Calvin, I.xvi.8.

²⁸² Calvin, I.xvi.3.

²⁸³ Calvin, I.xvi.7.

²⁸⁴ Calvin, II.iv.2.

²⁸⁵ Case-Winters, *God’s Power*, 40.

itself to control and determine all things.”²⁸⁶ Overall, Case-Winters sees Calvin as striving to find a place for providence between chance and fate: “his alternative was his doctrine of providence, that the world is ordered, not by chance or by necessity, but *personally*, by the constant and *particular* care of a ‘loving Father’ who by effectual action controls and determines all things accord to ‘his’ good will.”²⁸⁷ Calvin can be understood as claiming that divine providence is God’s personal care for the world in actively controlling and determining everything that occurs in the world.

In the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth understands providence as God’s controlling and upholding of the created world, claiming that the world “is wholly and utterly under His dominion and in His hand,” and that it “is always upheld by God, that it never falls out of His hands in this reality and autonomy.”²⁸⁸ Barth understands God’s providence along traditional lines, writing that “God fulfils His fatherly lordship over His creature by preserving, accompanying and ruling the whole course of its earthly existence.”²⁸⁹ The omnipotence of God in accomplishing the divine providence is addressed by Barth in stating that “God is able, able to do everything; everything, that is, which as His possibility is real possibility. God has possibilities – all the possibilities which, as the confirmation and manifestation of His being, are true possibilities.”²⁹⁰ But God is not the only power in existence for Barth, since “it is by His power that He creates or at any rate tolerates other powers. In this His power is always power in and over them, and He is always first and last the only one who is full of power. He is not at any point limited or determined by them, but at every point He limits and determines them.”²⁹¹

²⁸⁶ Case-Winters, *God’s Power*, 54-55.

²⁸⁷ Case-Winters, *God’s Power*, 62.

²⁸⁸ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1, 503.

²⁸⁹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/3, 58.

²⁹⁰ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1, 522.

²⁹¹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1, 538.

However, Barth cautions against defining God through the concept of omnipotence (omnipotence must instead be defined through God), claiming that “to define Him in terms of power in itself has as its consequence, not merely a neutralisation of the concept of God, but its perversion into its opposite. Power in itself is not merely neutral. Power in itself is evil,” meaning that “if power by itself were the omnipotence of God it would mean that God was evil, that He was the spirit of revolution and tyranny *par excellence*.”²⁹² God cannot be defined by omnipotence, yet for Barth God is all-powerful.

In *God's Power*, Case-Winters provides a thorough analysis of Barth's concepts of omnipotence and providence. She highlights the place in his theology in which Barth treats omnipotence, writing that “the all-determining notion of power which Barth in fact develops demonstrates divine freedom well enough but sometimes makes divine love and even the possibility of genuine divine relationship with a real ‘other’ more difficult to conceive.”²⁹³ Moving on to explore Barth's concept of providence itself, Case-Winters writes that “Barth's doctrine of providence in its three forms of preserving, accompanying, and ruling emphasizes divine power in a dominating and controlling mode. For Barth, that is its method of operation as well as its essential meaning.”²⁹⁴ This is because, for Barth, “providence is manifest as divine world governance controlling and ordering world occurrence in accord with the divine will. God is sovereign.”²⁹⁵ However, Case-Winters does point out one way in which Barth's concept of God has allowed for a limitation of the scope of divine power, stating that “since God is self-determined by the decision to create, God's freedom lies in being Godself (as God has chosen to be),” this means that Barth “does not exclude the possibility of a *voluntary self-limitation of*

²⁹² Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1, 524.

²⁹³ Case-Winters, *God's Power*, 100.

²⁹⁴ Case-Winters, *God's Power*, 105.

²⁹⁵ Case-Winters, *God's Power*, 105.

power. Barth does not see this as a diminishment but as a higher perfection of power.”²⁹⁶

Overall, Barth’s view of divine providence is best understood as God’s sovereign omnipotent preserving, accompanying, and ruling of all things from before the beginning of time.

Similarly, Guthrie considers divine providence to be God’s loving care for creation as God provides for its continuing good existence. In *Christian Doctrine*, he views providence as the doctrine “that the loving, just, and powerful God who first made heaven and earth continues to uphold, protect, rule over, take care of – provide for – God’s good creation and each one of us.”²⁹⁷ Guthrie sees the omnipotence behind providence as meaning “*that God can do anything and everything that is consistent with God’s goodness and love.*”²⁹⁸ He thus understands God as having set a voluntary self-limitation on divine power, in that God can only use God’s power in the ways through which God has chosen to express God’s love for creation. Even in the moments where evil seems to reign, however, Guthrie claims that God ultimately turns the evil into good, since a Biblical understanding of providence “knows that God is so powerful that evil must finally serve God’s good will for our sake. God does not will evil; evil is what God does *not* will. Nevertheless God’s power is so great that it can make good come out of evil.”²⁹⁹

And in *Always Being Reformed*, Guthrie addresses God’s power as the liberating power of God to accomplish the divine will. There, he defends an all-powerful God who does not in fact do all things: “that God is an all-powerful God does not mean that everything that happens is the will of God. It means that God’s loving and just will *will* be done. Many things happen that God does not will and does not cause.”³⁰⁰ Not only does Guthrie thus limit the scope of God’s control over the events of the world, but he also reconsiders the kind of power God uses, writing

²⁹⁶ Case-Winters, *God’s Power*, 108.

²⁹⁷ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 166.

²⁹⁸ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 111-112.

²⁹⁹ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 188.

³⁰⁰ Guthrie, *Always Being Reformed*, 49.

that “the sovereign power of God is not power that dominates and controls. It is power that liberates and enables.”³⁰¹ God’s providence, for Guthrie, is divine self-limited omnipotence working to accomplish God’s will in God’s ongoing caring for creation.

Among the many Reformed voices that should be drawn into the exploration of divine providence is the Westminster Confession of Faith, which sees providence as God’s eternal decisions ordaining everything that will be: “God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass.”³⁰² The Heidelberg Catechism, likely written primarily by Zacharius Ursinus in 1563, claims that divine providence is “the almighty and ever-present power of God whereby he still upholds, as it were by his own hand, heaven and earth together with all creatures, and rules in such a way that leaves and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and unfruitful years, food and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, and everything else, come to us not by chance but by his fatherly hand.”³⁰³ Together, these show that God’s providence can be understood historically as God’s complete control over every event of the universe. Farley writes that the Reformed tradition “has traditionally understood the providence of God to embrace a threefold work: God’s preservation of *creation*, God’s cooperation with all created entities, and God’s guidance of all things toward God’s ultimate purposes and their highest good.”³⁰⁴ These voices of the Reformed tradition combine to suggest an understanding of divine providence that is God’s constant and eternal caring for creation, using divine omnipotent power to guide all things.

The writings of these Reformed theologians show that the Reformed tradition has understood the concept of providence to mean that God provides for the universe in every way,

³⁰¹ Guthrie, *Always Being Reformed*, 50.

³⁰² “Westminster Confession,” 6.014.

³⁰³ “The Heidelberg Catechism,” in Presbyterian, *Confessions*, 4.027.

³⁰⁴ Benjamin W. Farley, “Providence of God,” in McKim, *Handbook*, 187.

moving all things according to God's will. Calvin understands providence as God's active control and determination of everything that occurs. Barth's concept of the doctrine is of providence as God's free preserving, accompanying, and ruling of all things. For Guthrie, providence is the self-limited omnipotence of God in the ongoing caring for creation. The other Reformed voices explored above historically see providence as God's constant caring for creation, guiding or controlling all things. It will be noticed that the theologians' concepts of divine power have also been addressed here, as God's power is inherently related to providence. For God's power, God's ability to enact God's will, lies at the heart of understanding how God provides for and guides the world. The best understanding of the Reformed tradition's doctrine of providence is that it is God's sovereign ongoing care for creation, in which the divine power is used to control or guide all things.

For some Reformed theologians, Christ is *the* central doctrine of Christianity, the one that contains within it all others. Barth's understanding of Christ in particular must be explored in order to see what Christ means for the Reformed tradition. The heart of Reformed Christology is that Christ is fully God and fully human, providing us with the only true insight on who God is and who humanity should be. Only by being both God and human is Christ able to be the revelation of God and the reconciliation of God with creation. While it can be seen from the lens of the Reformed tradition that Christ is the exclusive revelation of God, there may be room for other revelations of God for some Reformed theologians.

Calvin conceptualizes Christ as one person, a unity of both divine and human natures through the virgin birth. In the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin addresses the person of Christ as being fully God and fully human yet sinless, drawing on Paul to write that "we make Christ free of all stain not just because he was begotten of his mother without copulation with

man, but because he was sanctified by the Spirit that the generation might be pure and undefiled as would have been true before Adam's fall."³⁰⁵ Calvin also affirms the traditional Christian doctrine of the unity of Christ's natures without their mixture, stating that "he who was the Son of God became the Son of man – not by confusion of substance, but by unity of person. For we affirm his divinity so joined and united with his humanity that each retains its distinctive nature unimpaired, and yet these two natures constitute one Christ."³⁰⁶

Humanity is made to partake in Christ's righteousness through conforming to Christ as the true image of God, according to Calvin: "we see how Christ is the most perfect image of God; if we are conformed to it, we are so restored that with true piety, righteousness, purity, and intelligence we bear God's image."³⁰⁷ But there is another aspect of the work of Christ in Calvin, whereby Christ eliminates the evil within the elect, as can be seen by Calvin writing that "to take away all cause for enmity and to reconcile us utterly to himself, he wipes out all evil in us by the expiation set forth in the death of Christ."³⁰⁸ Both of these salvific movements (removal of sin and being given righteousness) are achieved through participation in Christ, since according to Calvin "both things happen to us by participation in Christ."³⁰⁹

Gibson, in analyzing Christology and election in *Reading the Decree*, sees Calvin as emphasizing Christ's role as the elector of humanity, both in time and in eternity: "reaching back into eternity there is the pre-existent Son who is the author of election, the active subject who participates in the decree of election. However, this Christ is also the object of the decree, the elect One, both as the pre-existent Mediator and as the Mediator in time."³¹⁰ And Gibson goes on

³⁰⁵ Calvin, II.xiii.4.

³⁰⁶ Calvin, II.xiv.1.

³⁰⁷ Calvin, I.xv.4.

³⁰⁸ Calvin, II.xvi.3.

³⁰⁹ Calvin, III.iii.9.

³¹⁰ Gibson, 4.

to claim that “Calvin’s Christ chooses a portion of humanity and, according to his divine nature, this choosing may be said to be eternal.”³¹¹ Through Gibson’s reading and Calvin’s own works, it is clear that Calvin is claiming that Christ is the eternal Son of God who also became Son of man, uniting two natures in one person, and who achieves salvation for the elect by granting forgiveness of sins and righteousness in life to those who participate in Christ.

Barth sees Christ as the center of history and theology and as the unity of humanity and God, claiming in the *Church Dogmatics* that “the purpose and therefore the meaning of creation is to make possible the history of God’s covenant with man which has its beginning, its centre and its culmination in Jesus Christ.”³¹² Not only is Christ the center of history, but Barth also considers Christ to be the only legitimate topic of theology: “there are strictly speaking no Christian themes independent of Christology.”³¹³ Through the union of God and man in the person of Jesus Christ, the reconciliation of all creation to God is made possible, with Barth writing that “Jesus Christ alone is very God and very man. And it is on the basis of this *unio*, but clearly differentiated from it, that there is an *adoptio*.”³¹⁴

The centrality of Christ for Barth is difficult to overstate. In his 1922 *Epistle to the Romans*, he writes that “the day of Jesus Christ is the day of *all* days; the brilliant and visible light of this one point is the hidden invisible light of all points.”³¹⁵ In “The Humanity of God,” Barth writes of Christ that “in his one person Jesus Christ is at once as true God humanity’s faithful partner, and as true human being God’s faithful partner, both the Lord abased to community with humanity, and the servant exalted to community with God.”³¹⁶ Later, in

³¹¹ Gibson, 81.

³¹² Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/1, 42.

³¹³ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1, 320.

³¹⁴ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1, 486.

³¹⁵ Barth, “Epistle to the Romans,” 130.

³¹⁶ Barth, “Humanity of God,” 53.

Evangelical Theology, he analyzes Christ by writing that the event of Christ “speaks of the realized unity of true God and true man, of the God who descends to community with man, gracious in his freedom, and of man who is exalted to community with him, thankful in his freedom.”³¹⁷ It is by Jesus Christ’s unique constitution as fully God and fully man that the work of Christ is possible.

Barth understands revelation and reconciliation to be two terms for the one work of Jesus Christ, stating in *Church Dogmatics* that “the work of the Son or Word is the presence and declaration of God which, in view of the fact that it takes place miraculously in and in spite of human darkness, we can only describe as revelation. The term reconciliation is another word for the same thing.”³¹⁸ Donna Bowman writes on Barth’s understanding of the work of Christ as related to election in *The Divine Decision*, stating that “the offer itself is Jesus Christ, and its acceptance is Jesus Christ. The entire transaction takes place in this single concrete human being; therefore, for the rest of humanity, election is already offered and accepted.”³¹⁹ Gibson, in his *Reading the Decree*, sees Barth’s Christ as the incarnation of the universal election of all humanity, writing that “*Christus decretum est*. If in Calvin’s doctrine Christ stands in a certain relation to the decree, albeit a relation that cannot be described simplistically, in Barth’s doctrine Christ *is* the decree.”³²⁰ Barth’s Christology sees Christ as the center-point of history and theology, fully God and fully human, who works to reveal God to humanity and to reconcile creation to God as the embodiment of election.

Like Barth, Guthrie considers Christ to be the center-point of all theology. He writes in *Christian Doctrine* that Christology is not “just one doctrine among others,” because “we could

³¹⁷ Barth, *Evangelical Theology*, 22.

³¹⁸ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/1, 409.

³¹⁹ Bowman, 54.

³²⁰ Gibson, 5.

not talk about who God is, how we know God, what God is like, and what God wants with us without talking about God's self-disclosure in Christ. Nor could we talk about what it means to be human beings in the image of God and sinners who contradict their own humanity without talking about Jesus."³²¹ Jesus is able to show what true humanity is because he was fully human, as Guthrie highlights in writing that "physically *and* intellectually *and* emotionally *and* spiritually, Jesus lived the same life we all live. He hurt. He played and went to parties. He had to learn. He could be afraid as well as self-confident. He could feel lonely and abandoned by God and his friends. He was one of us – a human being."³²² On the divine side of Jesus, Guthrie puts forward the notion that Christ reveals God not as a supreme sovereign, but as a lowly God who has descended to humanity, writing that "in the story of Jesus Christ, Son of God, the Word became flesh, God-with-us, we see the self-humiliation of God and the exaltation (making great) of humanity."³²³

Guthrie is firmly opposed to the satisfaction theory of atonement championed by Anselm, claiming that "despite the great influence of Anselm's view, it is unbiblical. Nowhere does scripture use the word *satisfaction*. It tells us that Jesus came to *express*, not to *change*, God's mind."³²⁴ But if Jesus was doing the work of God in atonement, why was his death necessary? Guthrie answers this important question, stating that it is "because words were not enough: *action* was necessary to prove that God's love and forgiveness are genuine. Because God wanted to stand with us in the loneliness and alienation we bring on ourselves when we separate ourselves from God and other people. Because it is just when God comes to our side in our

³²¹ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 229.

³²² Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 240.

³²³ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 247.

³²⁴ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 258.

loneliness, alienation, and guilt that they are overcome.”³²⁵ In Guthrie’s theology, Christ is the full God and full human who reveals for all time the truth of God’s descent to be with humanity, enacting humanity’s forgiveness and liberation.

There are many other Reformed voices that could be drawn into the discussion of Reformed Christology. The Second Helvetic Confession (written in 1564 by Heinrich Bullinger) addresses Christ in the traditional manner as a unity of two unmixed substances or natures, since it states that “we therefore acknowledge two natures or substances, the divine and the human, in one and the same Jesus Christ our Lord (Heb., ch. 2). And we say that these are bound and united with one another in such a way that they are not absorbed, or confused, or mixed, but are united or joined together in one.”³²⁶ Regarding the work of Christ, the Second Helvetic Confession claims that “by his passion and death and everything which he did and endured for our sake by his coming in the flesh, our Lord reconciled all the faithful to the heavenly Father, made expiation for our sins, disarmed death, overcame damnation and hell, and by his resurrection from the dead brought again and restored life and immortality.”³²⁷ This shows that Christ can be understood historically in the Reformed tradition as the one who is fully God and fully human, and who achieved salvation and immortality for the faithful. McKim also deals with Christ, writing that Jesus Christ is “the promised Messiah who as God incarnate is God’s self-revelation who brought salvation to the world.”³²⁸ He, like others, thus sees Christ as God and human, whose work includes both revelation and salvation. These two voices of Reformed theology suggest an understanding of Christ that is traditional in seeing Christ as an unmixed unity of two natures, who both reveals God and provides salvation for the faithful of humanity.

³²⁵ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 260.

³²⁶ Heinrich Bullinger, “The Second Helvetic Confession,” in Presbyterian, *Confessions*, 5.066.

³²⁷ Bullinger, 5.077.

³²⁸ McKim, *Dictionary*, 150.

The Reformed tradition has understood Christ to be the unity of the two natures of divinity and humanity whose work achieves salvation, as can be seen in all the Reformed theologies seen above. Calvin envisions Christ as the personal unity of the eternal God with human nature, giving salvation to the elect through their participation in Christ. Barth's Christ is the center of history, God and human, revealing God and reconciling creation to God. Christ for Guthrie is the revelation of God's descent to be with humanity, forgiving and freeing humanity. For McKim and the Second Helvetic Confession, Christ is the revelation of God and the salvation of humanity within Christ's unity of natures. Therefore, Reformed Christology as a whole sees Christ as an unmixed unity of God and human, who provides salvation through revealing God to humanity and reconciling humanity to God.

A Reformed doctrine intimately connected to Christ is the doctrine of election, which is also one of the most heavily emphasized doctrines in Reformed theology. The doctrine of election in the Reformed tradition can be summarized as God's decision to include humanity in the divine plan and to reconcile creation to God's self. Election must be the free decision of God, because only then is election able to be effective, although there is a diversity of views within the Reformed tradition on the number of people to be included among the elect. Election is often in danger of being seen only as the predestination of select individuals irrevocably decided before the beginning of time, but that is not actually the case for the majority of Reformed theologians when their works are more closely examined.

Calvin, coming from the beginning of the Reformed tradition, views election as God's eternal decision before time regarding the life, death, and salvation (or damnation) of every individual. He summarizes his doctrine of election in the *Institutes*: "God once established by his eternal and unchangeable plan those whom he long before determined once for all to receive into

salvation, and those whom, on the other hand, he would devote to destruction.”³²⁹ This results in God choosing to save some while damning others, as Calvin happily shares in claiming that “we shall never be clearly persuaded, as we ought to be, that our salvation flows from the wellspring of God’s free mercy until we come to know his eternal election, which illumines God’s grace by this contrast: that he does not indiscriminately adopt all into the hope of salvation but gives to some what he denies to others.”³³⁰

Along with election is a calling to holy living, as Calvin shows from his reading of Paul: “Paul teaches that we have been chosen to this end: that we may lead a holy and blameless life.”³³¹ However, Calvin does recognize the terror within the doctrine of election, since it results in a God who chooses not to save some, writing that “the decree is dreadful indeed, I confess. Yet no one can deny that God foreknew what end man was to have before he created him, and consequently foreknew because he so ordained by his decree.”³³² Summarizing his view of election, Calvin writes that “we call predestination God’s eternal decree, by which he determined with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others. Therefore, as any man has been created to one or the other of these ends, we speak of him as predestined to life or to death.”³³³ Throughout his doctrine of election, Calvin is taking great strides to uphold the sovereignty, providence, and omnipotence of God.

Gibson’s analysis of Calvin’s doctrine of election in *Reading the Decree* claims that Christ is the author of election for Calvin in two ways, since “the Son who chooses his own

³²⁹ Calvin, III.xxi.7.

³³⁰ Calvin, III.xxi.1.

³³¹ Calvin, III.xxiii.12.

³³² Calvin, III.xxiii.7.

³³³ Calvin, III.xxi.5.

before the creation of the world also redeems his own in time, as *Deus manifestatus in carne*.³³⁴ But Christ is also the object of election in this analysis, representing all of humanity: “this eternal election in Christ appears to be what we may describe as a ‘representative’ election. Christ is appointed as the head of his people, and as such he is the representative of their election.”³³⁵ In *The Divine Decision*, Bowman briefly addresses aspects of Calvin’s doctrine of election. She writes that for Calvin election “does not occur at the most prominent locus in the system,” but rather election “is an expression of God’s absolute sovereignty over creation, which is demonstrated by God’s freedom to elect and reject unconditionally and by the creature’s complete passivity in election.”³³⁶ In Bowman’s understanding, Calvin’s doctrine of election is less central than the one in Barth, and perhaps less central than it is often portrayed as being for Calvin. As can be seen from Calvin’s theology and these examinations of it, Calvin’s doctrine of election claims that election is primarily concerned with God’s sovereign eternal decision before time, choosing some individuals for salvation and others for damnation.

Barth understands election to be the best news that can be heard for humanity in the *Church Dogmatics*, writing that “the doctrine of election is the sum of the Gospel because of all words that can be said or heard it is the best: that God elects man; that God is for man too the One who loves in freedom. It is grounded in the knowledge of Jesus Christ because He is both the electing God and elected man in One.”³³⁷ For Barth, then, election deals both with elected humanity and with the electing and elected God, since “in Jesus Christ God in His free grace determines Himself for sinful man and sinful man for Himself. He therefore takes upon Himself the rejection of man with all its consequences, and elects man to participation in His own

³³⁴ Gibson, 57.

³³⁵ Gibson, 64.

³³⁶ Bowman, 17.

³³⁷ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/2, 3.

glory.”³³⁸ But election is not merely for the individual, or for God alone, since it is also an election of the community: “the election of grace, as the election of Jesus Christ, is simultaneously the eternal election of the one community of God.”³³⁹ Election extends to the everyday life of humanity as free, social creatures as well, not merely to the predestination of souls, as seen in Barth’s “The Humanity of God,” wherein he writes that it is “beings in their special totality, that God means, loves and calls them. It is as such beings, realizing their special nature, that they may and must praise him and put themselves thankfully at the service of his grace.”³⁴⁰ Barth’s doctrine of election is the free grace of God to choose to be for us, elevating humanity to participation in God, both individually and corporately, both in this life and the next.

Writing on Barth in *Reading the Decree*, Gibson shows that Barth expands election beyond its traditional understandings to include revelation, since Jesus himself, both God and human, is electing and elected: “he will use the word ‘election’ in counter-intuitive ways: election will describe who God *is*, not merely what God does.”³⁴¹ Gibson also briefly addresses the fact that Barth does have a moment of double predestination, albeit one that does not follow the tradition at all, in that “because Jesus Christ is elected man as well as electing God, this means that God elects himself to fellowship with man (and so chooses rejection) and elects man to fellowship with himself (and so bestows gift and inestimable blessing).”³⁴² Jesus can therefore be seen as the rejected in Barth’s theology, with all of humanity being elected.

Bowman, in *The Divine Decision*, provides a detailed analysis of Barth’s doctrine of election. She illustrates the central roles played by election and Christ in Barth’s theology by writing that “there is no way to exaggerate the importance of the doctrine of election for

³³⁸ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/2, 94.

³³⁹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/2, 195.

³⁴⁰ Barth, “Humanity of God,” 58.

³⁴¹ Gibson, 42.

³⁴² Gibson, 80.

theology, precisely because God's election is Christ and Christ is the totality of revelation."³⁴³

Bowman further emphasizes the importance of Christ for Barth as the one who provides the link between God and the elected, writing that the link "is Jesus Christ, who in Barth's doctrine occupies (and specifies) both halves of the election relationship, being both the Elector and the elected. Further complicating this scheme is the fact that Christ is not only Elector as God but also as man, and is not only elected as man but also as God!"³⁴⁴

In summarizing Barth's doctrine of election, Bowman makes several important points that must be remembered: (1) "election most properly refers to the divine order established by God's decision to be for creatures,"³⁴⁵ (2) "the election of communities has a prominent place in Barth,"³⁴⁶ (3) "the doctrine of election does not render history irrelevant, but invests history with divine purpose,"³⁴⁷ (4) "the divine determination to bring creatures into fellowship with God means that creatures are given the ability to work with God toward the divine goal, participating in the freedom to act that is the proper arena of God alone,"³⁴⁸ (5) "election is not merely a matter of the eternal salvation of the creature for Barth; it also brings the creature into the sphere of revelation and enrolls it in the service of God,"³⁴⁹ and (6) Barth refers "to Christ as the complete revelation of God's self-election as well as the election of creatures."³⁵⁰ Through these analyses and Barth's own works, it is clear that Barth's view of the doctrine of election is that it is the eternal decision of God in Christ, the decision to be God for us, which includes God's determination to be rejected for humanity and for humanity to be participants in God's glory.

³⁴³ Bowman, 18.

³⁴⁴ Bowman, 20.

³⁴⁵ Bowman, 71.

³⁴⁶ Bowman, 72.

³⁴⁷ Bowman, 72.

³⁴⁸ Bowman, 72.

³⁴⁹ Bowman, 73.

³⁵⁰ Bowman, 73.

Unlike Barth, Guthrie primarily considers election to be the doctrine that attempts to explain whom God chooses to save. He identifies election as predestination, writing in *Christian Doctrine* that “in traditional theology it is called the doctrine of election: who does God ‘elect’ to save or not save?”³⁵¹ On double predestination’s assumed popularity in the Reformed tradition, Guthrie writes that some “Reformed confessions such as Calvin’s own Geneva Catechism, the Scots Confession, the Second Helvetic Confession, and the Heidelberg Catechism do not teach it. It is only one of several possible views in the Reformed tradition.”³⁵² Further, Guthrie dislikes double predestination because “it turns the good news of Jesus Christ into bad news at least for some people,” because “anyone who accepts this doctrine can speak of the good news of God’s love and grace only with open or secret reservations: ‘God loves you – maybe. Christ died and lives for you – maybe. You may believe and have newness of life now and forever – *if* you are one of the elect.’”³⁵³ Despite Guthrie’s focus on predestination as the meaning of election, he does have two elements within it that expand election beyond merely being about the eternal destination of individual souls. He includes a communal aspect of predestination by writing that “predestination has to do with the election of a *community* to be God’s people.”³⁵⁴ Additionally, those who have been elected are elected to service in this life: “they are chosen not to be God’s pets or privileged elite but to be God’s *servants*.”³⁵⁵ Guthrie sees election as the good news of salvation, which we may never be able to understand fully, and in which individuals and communities receive both salvation and a calling in this life.

There are several other Reformed voices throughout history that can contribute to an exploration of the doctrine of election, including the following. The Westminster Confession of

³⁵¹ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 119.

³⁵² Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 120.

³⁵³ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 123.

³⁵⁴ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 138.

³⁵⁵ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 139.

Faith claims that “by the decree of God, for the manifestation of his glory, some men and angels are predestined unto everlasting life, and others fore-ordained to everlasting death,”³⁵⁶ and that the election of God is so certain that “these angels and men, thus predestined and fore-ordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed; and their number is so certain and definite that it cannot be either increased or diminished.”³⁵⁷ This shows that election can be understood historically in the Reformed tradition as agreeing with Calvin’s doctrine of double predestination.

Bowman is another theologian whose understanding of election must be explored, particularly given her close analysis of Barth, although her theology is admittedly informed by a process metaphysic. In *The Divine Decision*, she understands the strengths of the Reformed doctrine election to be threefold: (1) “election is seen as the basic rubric under which God’s relationship with the world can be illuminated,” (2) “election orients the world toward an end that is divinely ordained,” and (3) “election reveals divine grace.”³⁵⁸ Bowman summarizes the centrality of the doctrine of election for any Christian theology by writing that it “is the foundation for the doctrines of creation, redemption, and sanctification.”³⁵⁹ One thing that the doctrine of election makes clear about God for Bowman is that “God is in relationship. Far from a lonely divine existence that excludes real communion with others, God chooses to establish a relationship with every creature.”³⁶⁰ Election is the central Christian doctrine for Bowman, containing all others within it as it reveals who God has chosen to be, who humanity is, and the relationship between God and creation as it expresses God’s love for us. These voices of the Reformed tradition combine to suggest an understanding of election that is central to Reformed

³⁵⁶ “Westminster Confession,” 6.016.

³⁵⁷ “Westminster Confession,” 6.017.

³⁵⁸ Bowman, 2.

³⁵⁹ Bowman, 214.

³⁶⁰ Bowman, 75.

theology as a doctrine incorporating God, creation, and the relationship between the two, the choice of God to give salvation to a humanity that shares in God's plan, historically often strongly associated with predestination and double predestination in particular.

These theologians, representative of the larger Reformed tradition, understand election to be God's decision to share salvation and a calling with humanity. Calvin understands election to be God's sovereign eternal decision to save some individuals and damn others. Barth's view of election is centered on Christ as the determination of who God will be and who the communities and individuals of humanity will be, including God's rejection and humanity's elevation in Christ. Guthrie's doctrine of election is the good news of individual and communal calling and salvation. The Westminster Confession and Bowman, despite having disagreements with one another, see election as perhaps the most central doctrine of the Reformed tradition, in which all other doctrines can be found, wherein God chooses to share salvation and the divine plan with humanity, although historically it has too often been associated only with (double) predestination. The best understanding of the Reformed doctrine of election is that it is one of the primary doctrines of the Reformed tradition, centered on Christ, in which God determines who God and humanity will be, and in which God brings humanity into salvation and the divine plan.

Since election represents the relationship between God and the world, and a real relationship moves in both directions, the idea that the world actually affects God can be found within the Reformed tradition. Theologians from the Reformed tradition, such as Barth, must be explored in order to see the extent to which God can be considered as affected by the world from a Reformed perspective. Given the sovereign nature of God, Reformed theologians essentially claim that the world can only affect God by God's own choice. Although the Reformed tradition may be stereotyped as claiming God is completely immutable, and thus the world has no impact

on God whatsoever, for most Reformed theologians this is not the case because of who God has chosen to be.

Unlike more recent Reformed theologians, Calvin views the world's effect on God as being essentially nonexistent. However, Case-Winters illustrates that Calvin's concept of God does have a tension between immutability and providing personal, particular providence to the world, stating in *God's Power* that "originating as they do from eternity, and being immutable (and therefore unalterable), divine determinations cannot in any way have their basis in a response to or interchange with world process," before pointedly asking "does not the doctrine of providence that Calvin has laid out, and in which he has invested so much, chafe against the unresponsiveness we find here?"³⁶¹ Heavily critiquing Calvin's concept of omnipotence and its consequences for the God-world relationship, Case-Winters claims that Calvin's doctrine in which "God universally and in all particulars brings world process into conformity with divine willing" is such that it "makes difficult any concept of genuine *relationship* between God and the world – which in the ordinary meaning of the word would entail mutuality and reciprocity."³⁶² Calvin, as analyzed by Case-Winters, can be understood as claiming that the world has no real effect on God since God's decisions originate from before the beginning of the world.

Barth claims that God is an event independent of anything else in the *Church Dogmatics*, but the living immutability of an event of God's own choosing, stating that "the fact that God's being is event, the event of God's act, necessarily (if, when we speak of it, we turn our eyes solely on His revelation) means that it is His own conscious, willed and executed decision. It is His own decision, and therefore independent of the decisions by which we validate our

³⁶¹ Case-Winters, *God's Power*, 67.

³⁶² Case-Winters, *God's Power*, 92.

existence.”³⁶³ But Barth cautions that the immutability of God is not the dead changelessness of philosophy, but is life itself: “it not only has nothing whatever to do with the pagan idea of the *immobile*, which is only a euphemistic description of death, but it is its direct opposite,” and thus for Barth the heart of immutability “is the reality of life and not of death. God’s constancy – which is a better word than the suspiciously negative word ‘immutability’ – is the constancy of His knowing, willing and acting and therefore of His person. It is the continuity, undivertability and indefatigableness in which God both is Himself and also performs His work.”³⁶⁴

In *God’s Power*, Case-Winters does point out one major way in which God is affected by the world for Barth, in that God has chosen to be God for us: “in the act of creation, God acted in a self-determining and self-limiting act, electing not to be God alone but to be God with and for the human being (II/2, p.169). Entailed in this is a decision for God to ‘be God’ in a particular way (i.e., to be ‘God for us’ and ‘God with us’).”³⁶⁵ It can be seen that Barth’s view of the world’s effect on God is that the world only has an influence on God through God’s own choice to be God for us, thereby making it God’s choice to be affected by the world.

Like Barth, Guthrie opposes a dead immutability and explores the world’s effect on God as being related to the world as a living person. In writing against an understanding of immutability that is in danger of positing a God who is “literally or emotionally and mentally dead” as a result of being “absolutely, rigidly, unchanging and unchangeable,” Guthrie emphasizes the fact that God is “an ever-present God who knows and cares for each one of us and is eager to give us what we need and help us learn what we should do to be faithful in our particular individual and social situation; a God who promises to say and do surprising, new

³⁶³ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1, 271.

³⁶⁴ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1, 495.

³⁶⁵ Case-Winters, *God’s Power*, 107-108.

things in world history and in our individual histories.”³⁶⁶ For Guthrie relatedness is essential to holiness, since “we learn from the holiness of God and Jesus that holiness does not mean being unrelated to the world but being related to it in a particular way – specifically, to be both against it and for it at the same time.”³⁶⁷ And in *Always Being Reformed*, Guthrie sees God as suffering alongside the world because God loves the world. In that text, he says that “the sovereign triune God of Scripture can also come to us as a weak, *suffering* God – just because, as Moltmann puts it, God is a God of sovereign *love* who can and does care enough to suffer with and for suffering humanity.”³⁶⁸ Guthrie views the world as being able to affect God because God is a living, loving God who truly cares about the world.

Bowman and Case-Winters, despite using a process metaphysic, both make claims within the Reformed tradition regarding the world’s influence on God. Bowman claims that “God elects real creatures in their own individuality, and accepts the reality of those creatures into God’s self – a reality created by the creatures themselves, conditioned by but not determined by any outside agency. Election establishes a reciprocal relationship in which creatures are affected by God and in turn affect God.”³⁶⁹ Bowman is here claiming that through God’s choice to be God for creation, God inherently is affected by the reality created by creatures. And Case-Winters considers it necessary for the world to be in a free, reciprocal relationship with God, writing that “a relationship, in ordinary usage, includes a social element with some degree of reciprocity and mutuality.”³⁷⁰ These two voices speaking in the Reformed tradition, albeit both with process influences, suggest an understanding of the world’s effect on God that requires true creaturely freedom, having a real effect on God through God’s choice to be in relationship with creation.

³⁶⁶ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 115.

³⁶⁷ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 339.

³⁶⁸ Guthrie, *Always Being Reformed*, 52.

³⁶⁹ Bowman, 176.

³⁷⁰ Case-Winters, *God’s Power*, 117.

Throughout its history the Reformed tradition has understood the world's effect on God to be the result of God's choice to be for us, as seen in the theologians explored above. Calvin sees the world as having no effect on God's eternal decisions. For Barth, the world only influences God because of God's own independent decisions. Guthrie understands God as a living, loving God who is affected by the world because God cares about the world. Bowman and Case-Winters understand the world's free choices as having a real effect on God through God's choice to be in relationship with the world. Overall, Reformed theology claims that the world influences God through God's choice to be in relationship with the world, to be God for us.

Connected to many of the Reformed doctrines that have been explored, especially sovereignty and the world's effect on God, is the concept of the uniqueness and otherness of God. In general, Reformed theology claims that God's most striking uniqueness is through being the only non-contingent being. From the Reformed perspective, God can only be the ground of all reality by being the sole necessary (non-contingent) being. For Reformed theology, there is an infinite divide between God and creation, a divide that for some may appear to separate God from humanity forever. But through examining the writings of Reformed theologians, the divide never remains, always being overcome by God even as God remains distinct from the rest of reality.

Calvin views God's uniqueness as being exhibited through the fact that God is the sole source and ground of the natures of all of reality, in the *Institutes* stating "that there is one God who so governs all natures that he would have us look unto him, direct our faith to him, and worship and call upon him. For nothing is more preposterous than to enjoy the very remarkable gifts that attest the divine nature within us, yet to overlook the Author who gives them to us at

our asking.”³⁷¹ He also writes of God that the divine righteousness and goodness is so far above anything we can understand that it is incomprehensible, claiming that there is “a righteousness higher than the observance of the law, and it is worth-while to maintain this distinction. For even if someone satisfied the law, not even then could he stand the test of that righteousness which surpasses all understanding.”³⁷² Calvin claims that the uniqueness of God derives from God being the only non-contingent being, the highest good, which is incomprehensibly above humanity.

Barth views God as unique in the *Church Dogmatics* through God’s necessary nature and through God’s love. He states that God is metaphysically unique because “God alone is God. He is the only one of His kind. There is not another God, either a second god or many gods.”³⁷³ God is affirmed as absolutely unique for Barth. But Barth offers a clue as to how God is considered unique in claiming that “everything else is what it is by Him, and therefore only dependently, in a contingent and figurative sense, and therefore not in a way that competes with God.”³⁷⁴ Barth also explicitly connects God’s uniqueness with God’s love by stating that “it is in His love above all that God reveals Himself as the One who is incomparable and therefore unique.”³⁷⁵ In *Epistle to the Romans*, while analyzing Romans 1:23, Barth emphasizes the divide between God and the rest of reality, which some have blurred, writing that “the understanding of what is characteristic of God was lost. They had lost their knowledge of the crevasse, the polar zone, the desert barrier, which must be crossed if they are really to advance from corruption to incorruption. The distance between God and humanity had no longer its essential, sharp, acid, and disintegrating ultimate

³⁷¹ Calvin, I.v.6.

³⁷² Calvin, III.xii.1.

³⁷³ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1, 442.

³⁷⁴ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1, 443.

³⁷⁵ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1, 450.

significance.”³⁷⁶ Barth’s understanding of God’s uniqueness is best seen through the fact that in his theology God alone has the nature of a necessary being, with all others existing contingently through God, resulting in a great divide between God and everything else in reality.

For Guthrie, part of God’s uniqueness is the perfect unity of transcendence and immanence in God: “biblical-Christian faith emphasizes both the sovereign power of a ‘transcendent’ God *over* all created reality and the nearness of an ‘immanent’ God *in* and *for* all created reality.”³⁷⁷ He further explores this concept by writing that “God is in fact far above us yet with us, distant yet near, mysterious yet familiar, powerful yet loving, loving yet powerful – both at the same time.”³⁷⁸ Although he has thus connected transcendence and immanence in God, Guthrie nevertheless admits that “God is infinitely superior to us and our world, far beyond anyone or anything we know or can imagine, not to be confused with any earthly or human reality,”³⁷⁹ such that “God’s love, power, goodness, and truth are far beyond even the very best and highest finite human thinking and feeling can imagine.”³⁸⁰ Guthrie’s theology claims that God’s uniqueness is God’s simultaneous absolute transcendence above humanity and the world and immanence in the world with humanity.

The Westminster Confession of Faith is another Reformed voice that can contribute to the discussion of God’s uniqueness. It claims that “there is but one only living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions, immutable, immense, eternal, incomprehensible, almighty,” before going on to list the ways in which God is unique through divine qualities: “most wise, most holy, most free, most absolute, working all things according to the counsel of his own immutable and most righteous will, for

³⁷⁶ Barth, “Epistle to the Romans,” 123.

³⁷⁷ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 153.

³⁷⁸ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 101.

³⁷⁹ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 111.

³⁸⁰ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 49.

his own glory; most loving, gracious, merciful, long-suffering, abundant in goodness and truth, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; the rewarder of them that diligently seek him; and withal most just and terrible in his judgments.”³⁸¹ Therefore, historically in the Reformed tradition God is unique as the only being who is perfect and infinite.

Reformed theology, represented by these theologians, understands God to be unique in God’s transcendence above the world. Calvin sees God as unique through being incomprehensibly above all contingent reality. For Barth, God is unique through the great divide between God and all other beings, all of whom exist contingently through God. Guthrie sees God as unique through God’s immanent transcendence and transcendent immanence. The Westminster Confession of Faith proclaims God as unique by God being the only perfect and infinite being. The Reformed tradition can be seen as proclaiming God’s unique otherness through God being the incomprehensibly perfect and transcendent ground of all contingent beings.

In our current pluralistic world, it is important not only to dwell on uniqueness, but also to see what resources the Reformed tradition offers for interreligious dialogue. Many Reformed theologians, especially ones farther in the past, will often be less useful here. But when Reformed theology provides an avenue for true interreligious dialogue, it is often through the understanding that Christ can be found outside of Christianity. For a Reformed theologian, God cannot be truly free if Christ is only limited to being found within Christianity. Often, the Reformed tradition leans towards seeing Christianity as possessing the fullness of God’s revelation, despite the fact that God can still be found elsewhere too, but this attitude is one that many theologians may question in their own approaches to interreligious dialogue.

³⁸¹ “Westminster Confession,” 6.011.

Calvin views Christianity as the only place where God's revelation and salvation can be found, and thus by implication interreligious dialogue is unnecessary and perhaps even dangerous. Calvin makes it clear what awaits those who do not believe in Christ: "since he is the only way, and the one access, by which it is granted us to come to God [cf. John 14:6], to those who turn aside from this way and forsake this access, no way and no access to God remain; nothing is left in his throne but wrath, judgment, and terror."³⁸² Similarly, he says that even those who do good works outside of Christianity deserve only punishment, for they fail even as they accomplish their good works, since "all who are estranged from the religion of the one God, however admirable they may be regarded on account of their reputation for virtue, not only deserve no reward but rather punishment, because by the pollution of their hearts they defile God's good works."³⁸³ Thus, Calvin can be seen as claiming that interreligious dialogue is unnecessary and can be avoided since Christianity contains the full revelation and salvation of God, both of which are impossible without Christ.

Barth sees religion as a human construct in the *Church Dogmatics*. But for him the Church is the one true religion living by the grace of Jesus Christ, since he claims that "the Church lives by grace, and to that extent it is the *locus* of true religion. And if this is so, the Church will as little boast of its 'nature,' i.e., the perfection in which it fulfils the 'nature' of religion, as it can attribute that nature of other religions. We cannot differentiate and separate the Church from other religions on the basis of a general concept of the nature of religion."³⁸⁴ For Barth it is the presence of Jesus Christ alone that makes a human religion into a true religion "because it is precisely in Jesus Christ, but also exclusively in Him, that the abundance and

³⁸² Calvin, III.xx.19.

³⁸³ Calvin, III.xiv.3.

³⁸⁴ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, 298.

plenitude of divine immanence is included and revealed.”³⁸⁵ In *The First Commandment as an Axiom of Theology*, Barth problematically writes that “God reveals himself as the sole god. God reveals all other gods as nothings. Their reality fades away before God’s revelation.”³⁸⁶

Bowman, in *The Divine Decision*, addresses Barth’s problematic views on Israel and Judaism in particular, writing that “Barth maintains that for its sins, Israel is chosen out of all of history to stand for disobedience, relegated to the representation of the form of divine rejection. This sin is for Barth the failure of Israel to recognize and acknowledge their Messiah, sent expressly to lead them into God’s fellowship.”³⁸⁷ As seen through his writings, Barth’s view of interreligious dialogue is best understood as a possible endeavor given the human aspects of religion, yet ultimately fruitless since Christianity, through the grace of Christ, is the locus of all true religion.

More open than Barth, Guthrie explores interreligious dialogue as modeled by God’s love for all people. When it comes to salvation, Guthrie shows a universalist influence in *Christian Doctrine*, writing that “when Christians think about predestination, they think about God’s plan to ‘unite *all* things’ in Jesus Christ, to ‘have mercy on *all*.’ For God ‘desires *all* to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth’ that sets people free.”³⁸⁸ When this is applied to non-Christians, Guthrie claims that “Christ lived, died, rose again, and is still at work to give them too a future and a hope. How can we Christians take non-Christians’ unbelief more seriously than we take what God has told us God plans and wills for them?”³⁸⁹ Although primarily addressing Christian ecumenical unity and diversity in *Diversity in Faith – Unity in Christ*, Guthrie also briefly deals with interreligious relations. In this text, he sees the answer to the problem of relativism as located within a return to a form of orthodoxy, claiming that the world

³⁸⁵ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1, 319-320.

³⁸⁶ Barth, “The First Commandment,” 70.

³⁸⁷ Bowman, 58.

³⁸⁸ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 134.

³⁸⁹ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 134.

“needs *orthodox* Christians. It does not of course need Christians who destroy the hard-won advantages of tolerance and freedom of (or from) religion by trying to force others to think and live as they do. But it does need Christians who believe that they know the way in a lost and disintegrating world and dare to point it out to others as the right way.”³⁹⁰ For Guthrie, salvation is possible in other religious traditions, as is revelation, since Christ can be found in them too, but it is Christ who remains the ultimate truth and salvation everywhere.

In *Always Being Reformed*, Guthrie rejects exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism as approaches to interreligious dialogue because they all force a choice “between two unacceptable positions: *either* (with the exclusivists) we must choose to be faithfully Christian at the expense of being arrogant and intolerant of other religions; *or* (with the pluralists and inclusivists) we must choose to be open and tolerant of religious differences at the expense of compromising the unique claims and promises of the Christian gospel.”³⁹¹ Guthrie instead proposes a fourth alternative: “we must begin with the Christian confession that seems at first glance to make honest and fruitful interreligious conversation most difficult. We must begin precisely with the confession that *Jesus Christ* is the way, the truth, and the life.”³⁹² He claims that this can result in positive interreligious dialogue because Jesus Christ is not to be identified with Christianity and the Christian church, but rather is present throughout the world in all traditions, which allows Guthrie to say that the result of this approach to interreligious dialogue will be one of mutual respect and learning, writing that if we want to learn God’s truth “we will enter into conversation with people whose faith is different from our own (both outside and inside the Christian community) with honest recognition of the differences that separate us; with great modesty about our own piety, wisdom, and virtue; and with eager willingness to meet our own God in our

³⁹⁰ Shirley C. Guthrie, Jr., *Diversity in Faith - Unity in Christ* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 29-30.

³⁹¹ Guthrie, *Always Being Reformed*, 60-61.

³⁹² Guthrie, *Always Being Reformed*, 61.

conversations with them.”³⁹³ Guthrie conceives of interreligious dialogue as best pursued by Christians when they are humbly seeking to find Christ in their dialogue partners.

Among the other more recent Reformed voices that offer resources for interreligious dialogue is the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)’s Confession of 1967, which claims that “the Christian finds parallels between other religions and his own and must approach all religions with openness and respect. Repeatedly God has used the insight of non-Christians to challenge the church to renewal. But the reconciling word of the gospel is God’s judgment upon all forms of religion, including the Christian.”³⁹⁴ This shows that interreligious dialogue can be understood in the Reformed tradition as the call for Christians to be in dialogue with individuals from other religious traditions, both in order to share the gospel and in order that the Christian church may be critiqued and corrected as appropriate.

Building on Guthrie’s work seen above, in *Many Voices, One God* Douglas John Hall states that it is possible and preferable that for “a disciple community that knows itself to be living in a post-Christendom world, and conducts its life accordingly, the dimension of theological exclusivity (*skandalon*) that inheres in the Christian gospel is sufficiently distinguished from the historical exclusivism of imperial Christianity.”³⁹⁵ McKim also deals with pluralism in *Many Voices, One God*, emphasizing God’s freedom in claiming that “we cannot prescriptively close the door to God’s wider work through the Holy Spirit in religious faiths other than Christianity, even toward the purposes of salvation.”³⁹⁶ He thus sees the door as being open to the possibility for universal salvation, since to claim exclusivism (or universalism) is to set arbitrary limits on God. These relatively recent voices of the Reformed tradition suggest that

³⁹³ Guthrie, *Always Being Reformed*, 72.

³⁹⁴ Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), “The Confession of 1967,” in Presbyterian, *Confessions*, 9.42.

³⁹⁵ John Douglas Hall, “Confessing Christ in the Religiously Pluralistic Context,” in Brueggemann and Stroup, 66.

³⁹⁶ Donald K. McKim, “Reformed Convictions and Religious Pluralism,” in Brueggemann and Stroup, 87.

interreligious dialogue in Reformed theology is being open to learning about Christ from non-Christians, and to the possibility of universal salvation.

Interreligious dialogue has been a controversial matter for Reformed theologians, oscillating between Christianity as the only true source of revelation on the one hand, and acceptance of insights about God from non-Christians on the other hand. Calvin would have considered interreligious dialogue to be pointless since Christianity, through Christ, contains the fullness of God's revelation and salvific work. Barth viewed religions as having a human component that could potentially learn from one another, even though it is ultimately fruitless since Christ has made Christianity the locus of all true religion. For Guthrie, the model of interreligious dialogue to be pursued is a modified inclusivism in which Christians humbly seek Christ among non-Christians. The other recent Reformed voices understand the possibility of interreligious dialogue through openness to non-Christians having insights about Christ, and possibly also having salvation. The best way of understanding the complicated issue of Reformed approaches to interreligious dialogue is with the recognition that although Christianity is where God has chosen to bring about definitive revelation and salvation through Christ and the Holy Spirit, Christ is not limited to Christianity and is free to be found among non-Christians as well.

Throughout this exploration of Reformed theology, several different doctrines and concepts have been studied. It is possible to arrive at summary statements of these concepts, although they will undoubtedly leave out some of the depth and nuance that the more complete exposition has captured. In the Reformed tradition, divine sovereignty is the absolute self-sufficient freedom of God to love creation and to be for humanity. Total depravity is original sin's corruption of the good of human nature, enslaving humanity to sin and preventing

obedience to God. Divine providence is God's sovereign ongoing care for creation, in which the divine power is used to control or guide all things. Christ is an unmixed unity of God and human, who provides salvation through revealing God to humanity and reconciling humanity to God. Election is one of the primary doctrines of the Reformed tradition, centered on Christ, in which God determines who God and humanity will be and in which God brings humanity into salvation and the divine plan. The world affects through God's choice to be in relationship with the world, to be God for us. God is unique because God is the incomprehensibly perfect transcendent ground of all contingent beings. And there are resources for interreligious dialogue in the Reformed tradition because Christ is not limited to Christianity and can be found among non-Christians, even if it is also claimed that Christianity is where God has chosen to bring about definitive revelation and salvation through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

For many of these theological concepts, a core can be distilled from them that expresses the heart of what theologians in the Reformed tradition believe each of these particular doctrines is expressing about God and the God-world relationship. In order for the theology to remain Reformed, it is the following cores of each doctrine which cannot be altered:

For divine sovereignty it is the absolute reliability and constancy of God in being who God has chosen to be.

The core of total depravity is humanity's need of a savior because of its inability to rescue itself.

Providence, at its heart, is God's continual ongoing work in loving and providing for the world.

Christ, above all, is the God-man who reveals God and reconciles creation to God, especially through Jesus of Nazareth.

Election, in its primary essence, is the decision of who God will be and of who humanity can be.

The world affects God because, at its most basic, the living, loving God is being influenced by the world through God's choice to be in relationship with the world.

The fundamental Reformed understanding of God's uniqueness is the fact that God is different in kind from the rest of reality as the ground of existence.

And the center of Reformed interreligious dialogue is openness to seeing Christ even outside the fullness of Christianity's revelation.

In its cycle of soteriology, the Reformed tradition has generally given all agency to God as God elects to be God for us, using divine sovereign providence to control the world's existence and destiny. Throughout this chapter, the Reformed doctrines that make up the cycle of soteriology have been explored: the need for salvation in the doctrine of total depravity, and the work of God to bring about salvation in the doctrines of providence, Christ, and election. Taken together, these doctrines illustrate the ongoing process by which God saves the world. The core of each of these concepts, the heart of what they say about God, the world, and the interrelationship between the two, must be lifted out of the substance metaphysics in which it is found in the vast majority of these Reformed theologians. Using the core of the Reformed understanding of these doctrines, a more fruitful dialogue is possible with process thought regarding the similar soteriological movements found in both theologies.

Chapter Three

Movements of God and the World: A Process-Reformed Cycle of Soteriology

Now that the relevant movements within process thought and Reformed theology have been explored, it is possible to begin to bring the two traditions into dialogue. By bringing these two theological schools into discussion with one another, their points of agreement, similarity, and difference will become more pronounced and highlighted. What will be sought here is a middle ground between the two theologies, one to which both can agree even while recognizing the differences between them. This middle ground is the process-Reformed cycle of soteriology.

It is the hypothesis of this dissertation that it is possible to arrive at a collaborative process-Reformed cycle of soteriology, that by bringing the process thought exemplified by Alfred North Whitehead into dialogue with Reformed theology as seen in Karl Barth and Shirley Guthrie, the problematic Reformed soteriological concepts of divine sovereignty, total depravity, divine providence, and election can be understood in more adequate terms for the world in which we live through the lens of process thought's conceptions of novelty and divine natures, while also providing process thought with points of commonality and with unique emphases through dialogue with the Reformed tradition since they are both reflecting the same soteriological cycle of movements in the God-world relationship. If this hypothesis is confirmed, it will be of benefit for both the Reformed tradition and process thought.

This chapter seeks to test the hypothesis by bringing together the various movements of God and the world in the respective process and Reformed cycles of soteriology. After comparing the broad brushstrokes of the movements of God and the world, elements from both theologies will be compared with one another as representing specific moments in the cycle of

soteriology. Once the similarities and differences between the two traditions in these specific moments have been compared, the hypothesis of a process-Reformed cycle of soteriology will be clearly seen and stated. Throughout this analysis and dialogue, many technical terms will need to be used. Unless noted otherwise, any terms used in exploring process thought should be assumed to be defined by their use in the process tradition as seen in chapter one. The same is true with terms from the Reformed tradition, which is explored in chapter two.

Before comparing the movements of God and the world that are significant for one another, it is important to state clearly to what extent there is distinction, and to what extent unity, between God and the world. Because this is an exploration of God and the world acting on one another, by necessity the distinction between them will be emphasized. In contrast to this, it must always be remembered that God and the world are both interrelated parts of the same reality. However, this does not mean that there is no actual distinction between God and the world. Both process and Reformed thought are in agreement that God has a special distinction from the rest of reality, since for both God is ontologically unique. They may express it slightly differently (the primordial creature of creativity and exhibiting an inversion of processes versus the ground of all being and the only necessary being), but they are agreeing that God is fundamentally different from the rest of reality and has a special and necessary relationship with everything else. This is a point of doctrinal agreement found in both traditions.

God and the world are thus distinct as entities, yet they are simultaneously always one through their ongoing interrelatedness. God and the world can only be who and what they are through relationship with the other. God is the God of the world and no other, and the world relies on God for its continuing existence. Neither God nor the world could truly exist without the other (at least not as they actually exist in our experiences of reality). Together, as one

interrelated multiplicity composed of individual entities, God and the elements of the world constitute reality. The statements of this chapter, and indeed of the project as a whole, tend to emphasize the distinction of God and the world while downplaying their unity. But this is an abstraction from reality for the sake of our understanding. Any statements that we make are abstractions from the wider existence we experience since we can never hope to capture fully in theological or philosophical statements the full scope of all of reality. But with this caveat in mind, we can continue to explore the doctrines and concepts of process and Reformed theologies.

Throughout all of the concepts of process theology explored in chapter one, there is a movement of God in and toward the world. The divine primordial nature, the lure toward novelty, novelty itself, the consequent nature of God, and Christ all exemplify this movement. The primordial nature, as the realm of ordered possibility, is ordered by God for the world. The lure toward novelty, as the initial aim toward novelty in the world, is God's movement into the world to meet every actual occasion. Novelty itself is the incarnation of creativity, being the result of God's movement in the world. The consequent nature is God's movement to bring the world into God's self, since it is God's feeling and prehension of the world, transforming and receiving every occasion. And Christ, as representing God's love in the world through the incarnation of creative transformation, is God's love for the world. These broad movements of God into the world are addressed by several process theologians.

Whitehead, in *Process and Reality*, writes that "the primary element in the 'lure for feeling' is the subject's prehension of the primordial nature of God,"³⁹⁷ meaning that in every new actual occasion, God moves into that concrescing occasion as its lure for feeling and initial aim. He also sees God as the agent who orders creativity and potentiality, moving into the world

³⁹⁷ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 189.

in order to present potentials to be actualized by the occasions of the world, writing that “God is the aboriginal instance of this creativity, and is therefore the aboriginal condition which qualifies its action.”³⁹⁸ He makes this more explicit by saying that God is “considered as the outcome of creativity, as the foundation of order, and as the goad towards novelty.”³⁹⁹ Whitehead thus sees God’s movements in the world as embodying the ordered creativity of potentiality, moving into every occasion as a means of presenting that occasion with its initial aim.

Although Charles Hartshorne does not use the term primordial nature as frequently as other process theologians do, he does address the movement of God into the world in a similar fashion. In *The Divine Relativity*, he writes that “God can rule the world and order it, setting optimal limits for our free action, by presenting himself as essential object, so characterized as to weight the possibilities of response in the desired respect. This divine method of world control is called ‘persuasion’ by Whitehead and is one of the greatest of all metaphysical discoveries.”⁴⁰⁰ Here, he is clearly indicating that God moves into the world by presenting God’s self to every occasion as the possibility of novelty, guiding each occasion toward the best possible outcome.

Hartshorne presents a thorough analysis of God’s power over the world in *Omnipotence and other Theological Mistakes*. In this text, he writes of God’s power over the world that “the only livable doctrine of divine power is that it influences all that happens but determines nothing in its concrete particularity.”⁴⁰¹ He critiques the classical definition of omnipotence, claiming that “omnipotence as usually conceived is a false or indeed absurd ideal, which in truth *limits* God, denies to him any world worth talking about: a world of living, that is to say, significantly decision-making, agents. It is the *tradition* which did indeed terribly limit divine power, the

³⁹⁸ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 225.

³⁹⁹ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 88.

⁴⁰⁰ Hartshorne, *Divine Relativity*, 142.

⁴⁰¹ Hartshorne, *Omnipotence*, 25.

power to foster creativity even in the least of the creatures.”⁴⁰² Rather than view God’s power as controlling in the way the tradition normally has, he sees it as a liberating influence fostering creativity in all things. Hartshorne sees God’s movement in the world as God’s influence on the world through God presenting the divine self to each individual in order to offer the most favorable possibilities to that individual, persuading through influence rather than controlling and determining reality.

John Cobb, in general agreement with Whitehead, addresses God’s movement in the world in *Christ in a Pluralistic Age* by writing that novelty, the fundamental necessity for continuing existence, arises because “the Logos is immanent in all things as the initial phase of their subjective aim, that is, as their fundamental impulse toward actualization,”⁴⁰³ and that “to whatever extent the new aim is successful there is creative transformation. This creative transformation is Christ.”⁴⁰⁴ Therefore he is writing that novelty comes about through the Logos entering into each moment and becoming incarnate as Christ in the creative transformation that is novelty. In *Beyond Dialogue*, Cobb makes similar claims that the primordial nature is the origin of novelty in the world, writing that “it is precisely this ordering that is the basis for creative novelty and appropriate spontaneity in the world.”⁴⁰⁵ In these works, Cobb understands God’s movement into the world primarily as one in which God becomes incarnate in the world through the primordial nature’s presence in the world’s novelty.

Process Philosophy and Christian Thought, edited by Delwin Brown, Ralph E. James, Jr., and Gene Reeves, explores God’s movement in the world alongside many other topics. In it, Victor Lowe writes that “the theory that each occasion creates itself by realizing an aim internal

⁴⁰² Hartshorne, *Omnipotence*, 17-18.

⁴⁰³ Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, 76.

⁴⁰⁴ Cobb, *Christ in a Pluralistic Age*, 76.

⁴⁰⁵ Cobb, *Beyond Dialogue*, 127.

to it, however, requires that the germ of this aim be initially established at that spot in the temporal world by God; otherwise the occasion's self-creation could never commence, since nothing can come from nowhere."⁴⁰⁶ For Lowe, God acts within the world to bring about the possibility for every moment of concrescence, since without God's movement in providing the initial aim there would be no new reality. Walter E. Stokes remarks in his contribution to this text that "God's creative activity is a call to the creature to create itself. Since this involves interpersonal activity, the intensity of God's activity does not diminish but enhances the autonomy of the creature," in turn causing reality's "spontaneity because each creature freely responds to God's call."⁴⁰⁷ These process theologians see God's movements in the world as God's actions within the world to present each occasion with relevant possibilities for it, allowing for novelty to occur, albeit divine actions that only reflect one part of a larger indivisible whole.

Marjorie Suchocki also deals with God's movement in the world, writing that "it is as if every becoming occasion in the world begins with the touch of God, called by Whitehead the 'initial aim.'"⁴⁰⁸ It is through this initial touch of God that actual occasions are able to concresce in novelty. She is even willing to call this divine movement God's providence, claiming that "God's mode of action in history, whether through the sacrament or in any other way, is through the 'initial aim,' God's touch, God's providence for each occasion."⁴⁰⁹ Suchocki understands this aim, God's providence, to be directed toward the goal "that the harmony of possibilities shall

⁴⁰⁶ Victor Lowe, "Whitehead's Metaphysical System," in Brown, James, and Reeves, 12.

⁴⁰⁷ Walter E. Stokes, "God for Today and Tomorrow," in Brown, James, and Reeves, 257.

⁴⁰⁸ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 39.

⁴⁰⁹ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 157.

issue into a harmony of actualities,”⁴¹⁰ and thus always guiding the world toward greater harmony and intensity.

Earlier, in *The End of Evil*, Suchocki highlights that Whitehead emphasizes the importance of the primordial nature as it moves into the world, writing that “because God is that nontemporal actuality whose ‘origination’ stems from the mental conception of eternal possibilities, there is novelty and order in the universe rather than chaos or sheer repetition. Whitehead portrays this propulsion toward order in the world as being directly due to the primordial nature of God.”⁴¹¹ The initial aim that God provides to every occasion as God moves into the world has a common theme and goal, but is infinitely varied based on the contexts of each occasion. This requires the influence of the consequent nature, with Suchocki stating that “there is an essential openness to the primordial envisagement which requires the actuality of a finite world for its realization. Since the consequent nature is God’s feeling of the world, the consequent nature is essential for actualization of the primordial vision within the life of God. The integration of the natures is essential.”⁴¹² The consequent nature and the primordial nature together both move into the world in order to provide each occasion with its initial aim. Through these writings, it can be seen that Suchocki sees God’s movements in the world as the divine working in the world providentially to provide novelty and order to concurring occasions with the goal of harmony.

Monica Coleman briefly examines the process understanding of God’s movement in the world in *Making a Way out of No Way: A Womanist Theology*. She writes that “the possibilities we consider when we make decisions come from God. God orders these possibilities, urging us, or to use more process language, luring or persuading us, to choose those options that lead to a

⁴¹⁰ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 251.

⁴¹¹ Suchocki, *End of Evil*, 116.

⁴¹² Suchocki, *End of Evil*, 118.

vision of the common good,”⁴¹³ meaning that God presents the possibilities of God’s self to every moment. She also sees God as offering to “the world possibilities that are relevant for our current context. These possibilities are ordered according to a vision that calls us toward principles of beauty, truth, adventure, and art. As God influences the world, God literally becomes a part of every aspect of creation. In other words, incarnation is universal.”⁴¹⁴ God is thus everywhere in every moment and occasion, presenting the very best of all possibilities. She also claims that “in God’s calling, the world is offered a vision of heaven, and this allows us to participate with God in transforming evil into good.”⁴¹⁵ For Coleman, God moves into the world through God’s efforts to transform evil into good within the world, guiding every occasion toward the best possibilities for all of reality.

Catherine Keller includes God’s movement in the world in *Face of the Deep*, writing that ongoing creation (as seen in the biblical creation story) “reads out not as an imposition of order but as a fractal cascade of indeterminacy and form: a chaosmos eked *tohu vabohu* from the fluctuations,”⁴¹⁶ in which “the creator lures self-organizing systems out of the fluctuating possibilities.”⁴¹⁷ This interpretation of Genesis supports the process understanding of God’s movement in the world, one in which the divine moves within the world to guide its potential, rather than deciding to impose order by decree. Keller sees God operating on the world as a kind of strange attractor, stating that “the action of God is its *relation* – by *feeling and so being felt*, the divine invites the *becoming* of the other; by feeling the becoming of the other, the *divine itself becomes*.”⁴¹⁸ In Keller’s understanding, God acts on the world through a deep

⁴¹³ Monica Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way: A Womanist Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 54.

⁴¹⁴ Coleman, 60.

⁴¹⁵ Coleman, 71.

⁴¹⁶ Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 194.

⁴¹⁷ Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 195.

⁴¹⁸ Keller, *Face of the Deep*, 198.

interconnected relationship between the world and God, between God and the world. Through this relationship the world is lured to self-create possibilities presented by God. Keller conceptualizes God's movements in the world as God feeling and being felt by the world to invite and guide the world to realize its own becoming.

Roland Faber also addresses God's movement in the world, writing that God's "initial aim of an event designates the place at which potentiality becomes subjectivity. Just as the 'ingression' of potentiality into events is an act of God's primordial nature, so also the initial ignition of events – which are God's act of grounding, of the creation of new events."⁴¹⁹ Even in a process worldview, then, God's movement into the world can be seen as God's continuing creation of the world, with Faber claiming that "God is – stubborn to the contrary – the creator of *every* event happening in the world. God is not only inherent within every event, but is also the *beginning of its inwardness*."⁴²⁰ But he makes it clear that God is best seen as one who saves rather than creates, stating that "in a subtle fashion, God acts as creator as the *future of subjectivity* rather than as its *origin*."⁴²¹ Along the same lines, Faber also remarks that "Whitehead 'defines' God as the quintessence of uninventable novelty and absolute future, attributing both novelty and future to the *essence* of the event 'God,' insofar as it designates the primordial nature of God."⁴²² The origins of the world's novelty are thus associated with God. Considering all of this, Faber is addressing the world as having its origins in the primordial nature of God as the source of novelty, moving from the future into the present. Faber thus understands God's movements in the world as being God's opening of space to lure reality into the future as God provides the initial aim in every moment of creation.

⁴¹⁹ Faber, *God as Poet*, 96.

⁴²⁰ Faber, *God as Poet*, 96.

⁴²¹ Faber, *God as Poet*, 97.

⁴²² Faber, *God as Poet*, 84.

Joseph Bracken explores God's movement in the world, writing on the process understanding of causality in *The One in the Many* by stating that "in the Whiteheadian scheme divine causality is instrumental to the exercise of primary causality by the finite actual occasion in its self-constituting decision."⁴²³ In other words, in acting on the world God enables the world to cause itself, rather than being the cause of the world in a deterministic sense. In *Society and Spirit*, he similarly sees God as the creator in a particular way, using explicitly Trinitarian process theology to argue that "the 'Father's' initial aim to creatures at every moment is not simply a directionality for the exercise of their share in the power of Creativity, but likewise the communication to them of this self-same power of Creativity (understood as belonging to the divine persons by nature)."⁴²⁴ Bracken sees the movement of God (the Father) into the world through the initial aim as allowing the world to participate in Creativity itself, which he views as part of the Triune divine nature. Therefore Bracken understands God's movements in the world to be the instrumental causation of the world, sharing the divine nature of Creativity with every actual occasion so that they can be the primary cause of themselves.

Donna Bowman, in *The Divine Decision*, also deals with God's movement in the world as God's power over the world from a process perspective. Bowman claims that "God's power is to shape the entire world process toward the actualization of certain possibilities, the most highly valued in the divine subjective aim."⁴²⁵ Through using a process understanding of power, she writes that "God cannot abrogate the freedom of creatures, but it is God's gracious decision to enhance that freedom and use its results to build a world of maximal value."⁴²⁶ Bowman views God's power as God's election, or decision, to provide the world with ordered and viable

⁴²³ Bracken, *One in the Many*, 23.

⁴²⁴ Joseph A. Bracken, *Society and Spirit: A Trinitarian Cosmology* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1991), 128.

⁴²⁵ Bowman, 177.

⁴²⁶ Bowman, 154.

possibilities. God's decision, God's power, is God's movement into the world, God's presence through presenting possibilities to the world. For Bowman, God's movement in the world is the divine decision to enhance and guide the freedom of creatures through the presentation of possibilities to each and every creature.

The process understanding of God's movements in and for the world becomes apparent through these theologians' writings. God moves in the world such that God's movement into the world provides the initial source of creativity for every moment of reality, allowing for the continuing existence of reality as we experience it. Whitehead sees God as presenting to each concrescing occasion the ordered creativity and potentiality contained within the primordial nature. Hartshorne claims God presents God's self in order to influence individuals towards the best possibilities. Cobb proclaims that God is incarnate in the world through the appearance of novelty. The theologians writing in *Process Philosophy and Christian Thought* think of God as presenting possibilities to every moment and opening space for novelty to occur, one important stage within the larger picture of the God-world relationship. Suchocki conceptualizes God's movement as God's providence in providing novelty and order to the world. Coleman views God as calling all of reality toward the best possibilities for it, attempting to transform evil into good. Keller thinks of God as moving in the world to feel and be felt by the world in a deep interrelationship that allows for the world to become, actualizing its potentiality. Faber considers the divine to be presenting a lure towards the future possibilities and towards the subjectivity that creates every moment. Bracken understands the Trinity as sharing the divine nature of Creativity with actual occasions so that they can cause themselves. And Bowman thinks of God as guiding of the freedom of all creatures. Overall, the process understanding of God sees God as having an incarnate presence in the world in order to share with each occasion the ordered creativity and

future potentiality of the primordial nature, influencing and guiding each moment towards its best possibilities in an interdependent relationship between God and the world.

The movements of God toward and in the world can also be seen in the Reformed tradition through exploration of the writings of Reformed theologians. The core of the concept within these theologians is that God has chosen to be for creation and to love humanity. Only by having made this choice can God constantly and consistently move into the world to uphold and save it by God's plan and desire. Reformed theology is in danger of seeing God's movement into the world as God's unilateral domination of the world, but once the theological concept is examined in the works of these theologians, this understanding will be made more complex.

John Calvin, in the beginning of the Reformed tradition, views God as the sovereign creator and redeemer of the world, moving in the world to create, govern, and save it. In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin sees God as moving into the world through creation, writing that "God by the power of his Word and Spirit created heaven and earth out of nothing; that thereupon he brought forth living beings and inanimate things of every kind, that in a wonderful series he distinguished an innumerable variety of things, that he endowed each kind with its own nature, assigned functions, appointed places and stations."⁴²⁷ Thus, God is the creator and constant sustainer of all things. And despite our fallen natures, Calvin sees God as still loving us and moving into the world to save us: "however much we may be sinners by our own fault, we nevertheless remain his creatures. However much we have brought death upon ourselves, yet he has created us unto life. Thus he is moved by pure and freely given love of us to receive us into grace."⁴²⁸ Such is God's love for humanity that "whomsoever God wills to snatch

⁴²⁷ Calvin, I.xiv.20.

⁴²⁸ Calvin, II.xvi.3.

from death, he quickens by the Spirit of regeneration.”⁴²⁹ He is saying that all of reality, including creation and salvation, is the direct result of the movement of God in and for the world.

Commenting on Calvin in *God’s Power*, Case-Winters emphasizes two of the primary ways in which Calvin sees God as active in the world. The first is the ongoing divine governance of the world, wherein God “sustains the world by his immense power, governs it by his wisdom, preserves it by his goodness, rules over the human race especially by his righteousness and justice, bears with it in his mercy, defends it by his protection.”⁴³⁰ And the second activity of God in the world is teleological: “God is seen as guiding the whole process along according to the divine will, fulfilling foreordained purposes. Nothing escapes the all-encompassing divine willing and purposing, not even the smallest of matters.”⁴³¹ Calvin, through his writings and Case-Winters’s analysis, can be understood as claiming that God’s movement to and in the world is seen in the fact that everything that occurs in the world is a result of God’s movement in the world.

Barth addresses God’s movement toward and in the world in the *Church Dogmatics*, with some surprising parallels to process thought. He sees God as the event and action of God’s movement into the world to love all of creation, claiming that “God’s being is His loving. He is all that He is as the One who loves.”⁴³² Barth connects the being of God with the event or act of God, in which God moves into the world, writing that “with regard to the being of God, the word ‘event’ or ‘act’ is *final*, and cannot be surpassed or compromised. To its very deepest depths God’s Godhead consists in the fact that it is an event – not any event, not events in general, but

⁴²⁹ Calvin, III.iii.21.

⁴³⁰ Case-Winters, *God’s Power*, 53.

⁴³¹ Case-Winters, *God’s Power*, 54.

⁴³² Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1, 351.

the event of His action.”⁴³³ The event of God is an ongoing event in all times, and thus different from all other events: “it is also future – the event which lies completely and wholly in front of us, which has not yet happened, but which simply comes upon us. Again, this happens without detriment to its historical completeness and its full contemporaneity. On the contrary, it is in its historical completeness and its full contemporaneity that it is truly future.”⁴³⁴ As the eternal event of reality, God is also the immutable source of all novelty in the world for Barth, who claims that “it is by Him that all the new things in this reality exist. But all these novelties can and do exist by Him because it is in Him Himself that they have their ground, because He is immutable in the fact that He is the One who is eternally new.”⁴³⁵

In “Jesus Christ and the Movement for Social Justice,” Barth claims that God moves into the world to redeem it, that “redemption is not the separation of spirit from matter; it is not that humanity ‘goes to heaven,’ but rather that God’s kingdom *comes to us* in matter and on earth.”⁴³⁶ Later, in *Evangelical Theology*, he explores God’s movement by writing that “in relation to the reality distinct from him he is free *de jure* and *de facto* to be the God of *man*. He exists neither *next to* man nor merely *above* him, but rather *with* him, *by* him and, most important of all, *for* him. He is *man*’s God not only as Lord but also as father, brother, friend.”⁴³⁷ For Barth, it has always been a central element of this theology that God is *for us*, and thus is always the event of moving into the world, towards us, for our benefit.

In *The Divine Decision*, Bowman provides an analysis of Barth’s doctrine of election, which includes elements of God’s movement into the world and an understanding of Barth’s

⁴³³ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1, 263.

⁴³⁴ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1, 262.

⁴³⁵ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/1, 500.

⁴³⁶ Karl Barth, “Jesus Christ and the Movement for Social Justice,” trans. George Hunsinger, in Green, *Theologian of Freedom*, 105.

⁴³⁷ Barth, *Evangelical Theology*, 10-11.

stance on determinism. Bowman claims that for Barth “creatures are separated from God by an ontological divide that only God can overcome, because any overcoming of the divide is miraculous and supernatural, not part of the natural order,”⁴³⁸ meaning that if there is any contact whatsoever between God and creatures, it results from God having moved into the creaturely realm. But in addressing issues of predestination and determinism, Bowman sees Barth as supporting predestination but not determinism, writing that “predestination thus does not mean predetermination of every event in the life of the creature. Instead, it means that thanks to the divine election, the creature has a goal for its life that it could not choose for itself if God had not chosen for it in advance.”⁴³⁹

In Case-Winters’s analysis of Barth’s theology in *God’s Power*, she illustrates an inconsistency in Barth’s methodology reflected in his conception of divine power: “we find Barth implying that divine power in its true form is concealed as opposed to being fully revealed when God takes on the ‘form of a servant.’ This outcome is, of course, contrary to Barth’s expressed intention of finding in Jesus Christ – not elsewhere – the clue to the divine nature.”⁴⁴⁰ Ultimately, Case-Winters claims that “the apparent vulnerability we see in the incarnation and the cross – which might have pointed Barth to a new meaning for power – is swallowed up in and interpreted by the larger picture of divine power in the mode of domination and control.”⁴⁴¹ These two interpreters of Barth’s theology see him as claiming that in God’s power God has predestined all of reality, even if there may be space opened for individual freedom in how that destiny is accomplished. Through their analyses and Barth’s own works, it can be seen that Barth

⁴³⁸ Bowman, 21.

⁴³⁹ Bowman, 38.

⁴⁴⁰ Case-Winters, *God’s Power*, 111-112.

⁴⁴¹ Case-Winters, *God’s Power*, 113.

understands God moving for us, overcoming of the divide between creation and the divine in order to give humanity its freedom and salvation.

Guthrie understands God's movement in the world to be God's entrance into the world, especially through Christ and the Holy Spirit, to save and to create the world anew continually. He writes in *Christian Doctrine* that "God so loved the world – the *sinful* world – that God came in Jesus Christ to bring eternal life to those who believe in him. He came not to *condemn* the world but that the world – the whole world! – might be *saved* through him."⁴⁴² Relating God's eternity to the temporal nature of the world, Guthrie writes that God's eternity "means not the eternal *absence* of God *above* time, but the eternal *presence* of God *in* time. It means that at every moment in time, from beginning to end, the eternal God 'has time for us.'"⁴⁴³ There are several specific ways in which Guthrie understands God to be moving within the world. The first is through continual creation, since "Christians confess that God is *continually* making new beginnings, opening up new possibilities, initiating new events."⁴⁴⁴ A second way is through the movement of the Holy Spirit, which "can be summarized with the word *new*. The Holy Spirit brings new creaturely life that is stronger than sickness and even death itself; gives new beginnings to people whose lives seem to be at a dead end; brings new wisdom and guidance from God."⁴⁴⁵

And in *Diversity in Faith*, Guthrie sees God as exercising the divine sovereign power precisely by moving into the world and sharing in humanity's weakness. In this text, he says that we can learn what God's sovereign power is through Jesus Christ, where it is revealed that "God's loving power is God's power to be not only God *over* us but God *with* us. It is God's

⁴⁴² Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 398-399.

⁴⁴³ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 114.

⁴⁴⁴ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 151.

⁴⁴⁵ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 296.

power not only to *overcome* but to *share* human weakness, failure, suffering, and even death.”⁴⁴⁶

It can be seen through these writings that, for Guthrie, God moves toward and in the world through God’s presence in the world as seen in Christ and the Holy Spirit, a presence that saves and shares in humanity.

There are several other Reformed voices that can be drawn into the discussion of God’s movement in the world. The Westminster Shorter Catechism claims that “God, having out of his mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace, to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer.”⁴⁴⁷ This shows that God’s movement can be understood historically as God’s free decision to move into the world, establishing a covenant to save and guide those whom God has elected.

Bowman sees God as choosing to be in relationship with every individuality, even if creatures are free to respond with rejection of that relationship, writing in *The Divine Decision* that “even when God initiates a relationship and the creature rejects God’s vision of what the relationship will become, there is still a relationship – a tragic relationship of rebellion to be sure, but nonetheless, God and the creature are related to each other, and nothing the creature can do will break the relationship.”⁴⁴⁸ And Case-Winters claims that if Christ is truly taken to be the full revelation of God, the result would be a redefinition of the (divine) power used by God in the world: “the Christological orientation *does* provide clues as to how (and to what purpose) we might reasonably expect God to exercise power. It makes clear that the operation of divine power will always be within the scope of that which is loving and gracious and for our good. Thus it does, in a sense, narrow what may properly be thought of as within the scope of divine

⁴⁴⁶ Guthrie, *Diversity in Faith*, 91-92.

⁴⁴⁷ “The Shorter Catechism,” in Presbyterian, *Confessions*, 7.020.

⁴⁴⁸ Bowman, 195.

power.”⁴⁴⁹ These three voices of the Reformed tradition combine to suggest an understanding of God’s movement in the world in which God is moving into the world to establish a covenantal relationship with humanity through which God lovingly saves and guides humanity.

Through the writings of these Reformed theologians, it can be seen that the Reformed tradition understands God’s movement toward and in the world to be God’s efforts to guide and to save humanity. This understanding can be seen in Calvin’s view that God is the cause of anything that occurs in the world, especially the salvation of the faithful. Barth exhibits it through God being for us, moving into the world to give humanity its freedom and salvation. It is likewise found in Guthrie, in God’s presence in the world that saves humanity and shares in humanity’s nature. The remaining Reformed voices illustrate it too, as God’s establishment of a covenantal relationship with creation. The best way of understanding the Reformed concept of God’s movement in the world is to view it as God’s presence and works in the world in establishing a salvific covenantal relationship with creation even as God lovingly guides humanity.

There are several similarities to be found in the Reformed and process understandings of the movements of God in and for the world. Chief among these similarities is the establishment of a relationship between God and the world. In process thought, this relationship appears primarily as a fundamental characteristic of reality by which all things are interrelated. But this is especially true for the relationship between God and the world, wherein God provides the initial aim for every occasion. In doing so, God establishes an intimate relationship with every moment of reality. For Reformed theology, the relationship between God and the world is the result of God’s choice to be God for us. God establishes a covenantal relationship with the world, and with humanity in particular. Through this covenantal relationship, and through God’s self-

⁴⁴⁹ Case-Winters, *God’s Power*, 110.

election to be no other God except God-for-us, God must be in relationship with the world, caring for the world.

A second similarity in the process and Reformed understandings of God's movements in the world is found in their view of God's purposes in the world. For both, God is guiding the world towards its best possible end. In process thought, this is seen plainly through the initial aim God gives each occasion, opening up the possibilities for the best possible actualization of each moment. In the Reformed tradition God is also understood as seeking the best possible end for the world, because the relationship that God establishes with humanity is a salvific relationship, in which God provides salvation to the world, and because in the world God only wills for what is good to occur, thereby providentially guiding the world toward its best possibilities. These two similarities, the establishment of a relationship between God and the world and God's guiding of the world towards its best possible end, shape both traditions' perspectives on God, the world, and the salvific relationship between them.

But it is not just similarity that can be found in how process thought and the Reformed tradition understand God's movements in the world, for there is also difference to be found. The most important differences between process and Reformed understandings of God's movement in the world can actually be found within their similarities. For within the God-world relationship established by God's movement into the world, the traditions have two different views on the level of relationship that is established. In process thought, the God-world relationship is an interdependent relationship, in which both God and the world need one another, and which could not be otherwise in order for reality to exist. In Reformed theology, the relationship is one that God has chosen, a relationship that God does not metaphysically need. At least in theory, God would be no less God without the world for Reformed theology.

And within God's guidance of the world towards its best possible ends, the two traditions disagree over the method of God's guidance. For process thought, God influences each occasion by luring it towards the best possibilities for that occasion's concrescence. But for the Reformed tradition, especially as it has often historically been expressed, God exhibits a level of providential control over the world far beyond the influence found in process thought, with some going so far as to say that every occurrence of the world is the direct result of the will of God. These differences serve to highlight the different philosophies being used to interpret the same basic ideas found within both process and Reformed theologies.

Overall, it can be seen that both of these traditions agree that God moves into the world in order to be in relationship with the world and to guide the world towards its best possible ends. Process thought understands God as having an incarnate presence in the world in order to share with each occasion the ordered creativity and future potentiality of the primordial nature, influencing and guiding each moment towards its best possibilities in an interdependent relationship between God and the world. And the Reformed tradition sees God as present and working in the world to establish a salvific covenantal relationship with creation even as God guides humanity.

Through God's relationship with the world and God's guidance of the world, two formal doctrinal similarities between the two traditions are seen. When it comes to the interrelationship of God and the world, both clearly agree that the world has an influence on God, since without the world God would not be the God that exists. But they differ when it comes to expressing why this theological proposition is true. For process theologians, it is a metaphysical necessity that if God exists, then God must be interrelated with the rest of reality. But for Reformed theologians, God is related to the world because God has made the eternally binding choice to be God-for-us.

They importantly agree that God is God in a profound relationship with the world, but differ on the language used to explain why this is the case.

The second similarity exhibited here is seen in God's guidance of the world. Process and Reformed theologians both agree that God accompanies and guides the world in every moment, providing for the world. But they differ in how they express God's guiding care. Many Reformed theologians stress God's guiding power to control the world, in a literal sense of determining what occurs. Process theologians, on the other hand, are rightly suspicious of the language of control as implying a coercive type of power that does not make sense in a process worldview. Instead, process theology claims God's guiding power is found in God's influence on the world (which is the highest form of power possible in a process metaphysic). Both traditions agree that God does everything that is possible in order to guide and provide for the world, even if they philosophically disagree on what it is possible for God to do in God's caring for the world.

Each of the traditions highlights different aspects of the movement of God into the world. The relationality between God and the world is emphasized in process theology, and God's guiding (or controlling) of the world is emphasized by the Reformed tradition. These differing emphases can be explained by the different philosophies being used to explain the theological insight of God's movement into the world. In the process metaphysics used by process theology, relationship is paramount. All that actually exists in process thought is in relationship. It is clear that a process understanding of God's movements in the world would focus on the God-world relationship as the interpretive key. But in the substance metaphysics used by classical Reformed theology, the only way to conceive of a perfect God who guides the world is as an independent being who does not require the world in order to be perfect, and who must be able to accomplish anything that God wills in the world. In substance metaphysics God must choose to be in a

relationship with the world, because a perfect being would not require anything outside of itself in order to fulfill its perfection. And if God is truly omnipotent in substance metaphysics, then this means that God must be able to do anything that God wills. The consequence of this is that God's power must be seen as overcoming and limiting the power of all other beings so that God can providentially guide the world (unlike process thought where God's power is present in every occasion alongside the occasion's own power). Thus, the primary differences in understanding God's movements into the world found between process theology and the Reformed tradition can be seen as being caused by the philosophy each uses, not in the theology itself on which both traditions largely agree.

Just as movements of God in and toward the world can be seen in the concepts of process theology explored in chapter one, movements of the world in and toward God can also be seen. The primordial nature, as the future potentiality of the world, presupposes the movement of the world toward God. The lure toward novelty, as the primordial nature of God being presented to each occasion, is where the world accepts or rejects God's aims. Novelty itself is the world moving to make God's desires a reality, being the actualization of the potentialities God presents in the initial aim for each occasion. In the consequent nature, the occasions of the world move into God's self, since it is God's reception and transformation of the events of the world in the unity of God's nature. And Christ, being the perfect embodiment of God's initial aims, is the example to be followed in choosing to move toward God and actualize the divine aims for the world. The broader brushstrokes of the world's movements are addressed by several process theologians.

Whitehead sets the standard for process theology's understanding of the world's movements toward God. On the world's incorporation into God, he writes that God "prehends

every actuality for what it can be in such a perfected system – its sufferings, its sorrows, its failures, its triumphs, its immediacies of joy – woven by rightness of feeling into the harmony of the universal feeling, which is always immediate, always many, always one, always with novel advance, moving onward and never perishing.”⁴⁵⁰ The individual occasions and moments of the world are transformed by God as they are united with God’s self and enter into the consequent nature of God. He also sees the world as playing a vitally important step in the ongoing creative advance, one that moves from God and into God, claiming that “the universe includes a threefold creative act composed of (i) the one infinite conceptual realization, (ii) the multiple solidarity of free physical realizations in the temporal world, (iii) the ultimate unity of the multiplicity of actual fact with the primordial conceptual fact.”⁴⁵¹ Whitehead thus conceptualizes the world’s movements in God as the transformation and reception of each occasion into the divine self as the world’s creativity enters into God’s consequent nature.

David Ray Griffin also explores the world’s movements toward God, relating the world’s movement into God to the divine consequent nature in *God, Power, and Evil: A Process Theodicy* by writing that “worldly evil is transmuted into good when it is taken into God’s experience.”⁴⁵² He is thereby affirming that the world’s movement into God results in the transformation of the world. He further says that process thought claims “that worldly events which are intrinsically evil are transformed or transmuted as they are received into the divine experience,” but not “in such a way that the evil loses its character of evil so that the divine experience would be, as traditional theism said, ‘pure bliss.’”⁴⁵³ This transformation of the evil of the world within God is more world-oriented than it may first appear to be. Griffin remarks

⁴⁵⁰ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 346.

⁴⁵¹ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 346.

⁴⁵² David Ray Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil: A Process Theodicy* (1976; repr., Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 302.

⁴⁵³ Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil*, 303.

that “evil is ‘overcome by good’ in the sense that God, in responding to the evil facts in the world, provides ideal aims for the next state of the world designed to overcome the evil in the world.”⁴⁵⁴ In this understanding, the world moves into God in order for God to help the world transform itself away from evil toward good. Therefore, Griffin understands the world’s movements in God as the world’s transformation in God, which in turn allows the world to transform itself through God’s guidance.

Suchocki deals with the world’s movement into God by writing in *God, Christ, Church* that “God’s reception of the effect of the world is in fact the resurrection of the world into God’s own life.”⁴⁵⁵ This means that God is intimately related to every single occurrence in the world as it is resurrected into God’s interior life. But she also notes regarding this transformation that “the resurrection power of God does not annihilate the past, it transforms the past. That which was, is affirmed, but given a new dimension, a new context, a new direction.”⁴⁵⁶ The world moves into God, where God transforms it according to God’s vision for the world.

Earlier, in *The End of Evil*, Suchocki refers to this movement of the world by writing that God is “infinitely complex, incorporating the world into the divine self in an apotheosis which is the judgment and redemption of the world.”⁴⁵⁷ It is important to make the distinction that this is an act of God, not an act of the world, since “it is God’s subjectivity into which the occasion is now incorporated, and hence God’s subjective aim and God’s own freedom governs the process. The occasion is therefore not free to accept or reject its completion within God, for freedom belongs with the concurring subject.”⁴⁵⁸ As the world moves into God, the transformed world does not stay only in the consequent nature, but through God’s everlasting concrescence moves

⁴⁵⁴ Griffin, *God, Power, and Evil*, 303.

⁴⁵⁵ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 34.

⁴⁵⁶ Suchocki, *God, Christ, Church*, 114.

⁴⁵⁷ Suchocki, *End of Evil*, 135.

⁴⁵⁸ Suchocki, *End of Evil*, 111.

into the entirety of God, with Suchocki claiming that “the world must be pulled into the concrescence of God, which is governed by God’s subjective aim for actualization of the primordial vision. The actualization of the vision happens first and foremost in God, through just these prehended occasions.”⁴⁵⁹ In addressing subjective immortality, Suchocki here writes that “by being taken into this nature, the immediacy which has formed itself in finitude becomes a factor in infinitude, and therefore participates in the everlasting presentness of the divine life.”⁴⁶⁰ The fullness and subjectivity, the immediacy, of each occasion is therefore preserved within God. Suchocki understands the world as moving to be resurrected in God as God receives and transforms every effect and immediacy of the world within God’s own self.

Coleman writes on the world’s movement into God, stating that “God feels, or gathers into God’s self, the events of the world, and they live on in God. God knows us and knows what happens to us. This is how God rejoices with us and suffers with us. We are a part of who God is.”⁴⁶¹ This suggests that the world moves into God’s very being, in part creating who God is. She elaborates on this by writing that “God does not just know us; God actually incorporates the events of the world into God’s own nature. The world has an effect on and changes who God is,” with the result that “God is a true companion.”⁴⁶² Coleman is claiming that there are changes within God’s very self that are based on the events of the world, with the world having a real effect on God as it moves into God’s nature. Relating the world’s movement to the overcoming of evil, she says that “God relegates evil to the edges, saving that which is good within God’s own self. This is the kingdom of heaven. Only here is evil truly eliminated.”⁴⁶³ Coleman views the world’s movements in God as God’s bringing the world into God’s very self, in part being

⁴⁵⁹ Suchocki, *End of Evil*, 118-119.

⁴⁶⁰ Suchocki, *End of Evil*, 106.

⁴⁶¹ Coleman, 60.

⁴⁶² Coleman, 61.

⁴⁶³ Coleman, 71.

constituted by the events and occurrences of the world even as they are transformed through the elimination of evil.

Faber, in *God as Poet of the World*, addresses the world found within God by writing that the consequent nature of God “does not refer to *God’s* concrescence out of the prehension of the world (something the primordial nature already accomplishes in God), but to the freedom of the ‘universal concrescence’ of world, to its *redeemed transformation* into God guided, through God’s caring concern, by intensity and harmony.”⁴⁶⁴ He sees the consequent nature as “God’s orientation toward the world, in which God perceives and salvifically receives the world in order then to bequeath it to *itself* in caring concern.”⁴⁶⁵ While this means that God is not constituted by, i.e., does not concresce from, the world, it still suggests that through God’s orientation toward the world God perceives novelty as it is actualized in occasions and guides it into God’s self. Faber also claims that in the consequent nature, God “appears as infinitely understanding patience, as the judge who valuates the world process, as unconditional reconciler, as sympathetic fellow sufferer with the world, and as the promise of immortality. In it, the world process is *unfolded* and *released* for maximal intensity and then *enfolding* in reconciled unity.”⁴⁶⁶ In this valuation of the world, God perceives the actualized novelty of occasions into God’s self. For Faber, the world moves within God by being perceived and received by God and transformed for inclusion into the divine self.

Bracken, in *Society and Spirit*, writes that his “field-orientation understanding of the God-world relationship” can help to explain “how finite actual occasions upon completion of their process of concrescence in the space-time continuum are prehended in their subjective immediacy by the three divine persons and thus incorporated into the divine communitarian

⁴⁶⁴ Faber, *God as Poet*, 184.

⁴⁶⁵ Faber, *God as Poet*, 184.

⁴⁶⁶ Faber, *God as Poet*, 185.

life.”⁴⁶⁷ For Bracken, the field of activity of which the Trinity and all creation is a part constitutes all of reality, and when an actual occasion reaches satisfaction it enters into God in all of its subjectivity. In this, he is in agreement with Suchocki’s understanding of subjective immortality, writing that “with Suchocki I believe that God doesprehend finite occasions not simply as superjects or inanimate objects of prehension, but as subjects of experience enjoying the completion of their individual process of concrescence.”⁴⁶⁸ He thus uses this field-orientation understanding of the trinitarian God to explain subjective immortality. Bracken, using his field-orientation understanding of God and reality, sees the world’s movements in God as the subjective immortality of the world through participation in the field of activity shared by the divine persons and all of reality.

In Case-Winters’s *God’s Power*, the world’s movement within God can be seen in her primary definition of God’s power: that it is “the capacity to be influenced by *all* and to influence *all*.”⁴⁶⁹ She sees the world’s movement as a kind of power over God wherein “as God receives the world – in its entirety and in all its particularity – as an object of awareness, God is influenced by the world.”⁴⁷⁰ This understanding of God is a far cry from a classical understanding, which she points out by writing that “in contrast to the tradition which assigns all *freedom and power to God*, feminist thought and process thought see freedom and power as essential to every subject.”⁴⁷¹ Thus she understands God as being influenced by the world, since everything possesses freedom and power (influence), and God is influenced by God’s reception of the world. Case-Winters views this as the world’s movement within God: the world’s

⁴⁶⁷ Bracken, *Society and Spirit*, 160.

⁴⁶⁸ Bracken, *Society and Spirit*, 147.

⁴⁶⁹ Case-Winters, *God’s Power*, 211.

⁴⁷⁰ Case-Winters, *God’s Power*, 212.

⁴⁷¹ Case-Winters, *God’s Power*, 209.

influence, and thus power, over God through God's reception of every single seemingly-minuscle fact of the world.

Bowman also deals with the world's movement within God in *The Divine Decision*, which she claims is a power of response to the divine initial aim of election. She says that "God's election does not flow into a void, swallowed up by unchangeable history or unalterable fate. It is election for service – and the creatures elected have the power to serve, along with the inevitable shadow side of that power; the power to rebel."⁴⁷² She sees the world's power as one in which "the creature's response is effective in the ongoing creation of the future, and it is likewise effective in the everlasting concrescence of God's consequent nature."⁴⁷³ Therefore she is saying that God is influenced by the freedom of the world to respond to God's election. For Bowman, the world's movement in and toward God is the world's response to God and God's election, which is then taken into God's self.

The process perspective on the world's movement within God can be understood by looking at these theologians. The world moves in and toward God such that the fullness of the world's occasions are received and transformed by God as they are united with God's self. Whitehead sees the world's movement as the transformation and reception of the world within God's consequent nature. Griffin views it as the transformation of the world through God's guidance. Suchocki claims it is the resurrection of the world in God. Coleman addresses it as God bringing the world into God's self, being partially created by the transformed events of the world. Faber considers it to be the world perceived and received by God, transformed into the divine self. For Bracken it is the completed occasion participating in the field of activity shared by the divine persons and all of reality, thus achieving subjective immortality. Case-Winters sees

⁴⁷² Bowman, 180.

⁴⁷³ Bowman, 192-193.

it as the world's power over God through God's reception of the entirety of the world. And for Bowman it is the world's response to God and God's election, which is then taken into God's self. Overall, the process understanding of the world's movement into God is that the fullness of the world in its response to God is transformed, received, enjoyed, and resurrected within God's consequent nature, influencing God, and possibly achieving subjective immortality in addition to objective immortality.

Just as in process theology, the movements of the world toward and in God can also be seen the Reformed tradition. Here, it is primarily understood by Reformed theologians as the world moving into a state of being reconciled with God, through participation in Christ. Becoming one with Christ is necessary for God and the world to be reconciled with one another. The Reformed understanding of the world's movement into God can unfortunately at times appear to claim that the world is moved completely by God and has no agency whatsoever, but upon closer examination that is not the case for most Reformed theologians.

In the *Institutes*, Calvin writes that believers move through the Spirit to be united with God, claiming that by the Spirit "we come into communion with God, so that we in a way feel his life-giving power toward us."⁴⁷⁴ After union with God, even the good works of believers are changed so that they have an actual effect in righteousness, since Calvin says that "after the guilt of all transgressions that hinder man from bringing forth anything pleasing to God has been blotted out, and after the fault of imperfection, which habitually defiles even good works, is buried, the good works done by believers are accounted righteous."⁴⁷⁵ The resurrection of the elect that results from union with Christ is treated by Calvin as a resurrection of the flesh, as he writes that "we shall be raised again in the same flesh we now bear, but that the quality will be

⁴⁷⁴ Calvin, I.xiii.14.

⁴⁷⁵ Calvin, III.xvii.8.

different.”⁴⁷⁶ Like Barth would later, Calvin, too, attempts to solve the problem of human free will by redefining freedom, with Case-Winters writing that “Calvin conceived of freedom (both divine and human) as ‘the ability to act in accord with one’s will.’ Human beings have this ability, and, in this sense, are free. The catch is that human will is determined by God.”⁴⁷⁷ Humanity is thus robbed of true freedom, and is instead moved by God. Calvin claims that the world’s movement into God is movement into unity with Christ for the faithful, by the power of the Holy Spirit, who are then able to live in freedom to follow their wills as set by God.

In the *Church Dogmatics*, Barth sees the world as being called by God to act in love and service, claiming that “as God the Creator calls man to Himself and turns him to his fellow-man, He orders him to honour his own life and that of every other man as a loan, and to secure it against all caprice, in order that it may be used in this service and in preparation for this service.”⁴⁷⁸ Humanity is called by God to love, which for Barth means “to be obedient to the commandment of this God. In every case, therefore, love is an accepting, confirming and grasping of our future.”⁴⁷⁹ But the role to which humanity is called by God is one in which humanity is completely subservient and obedient to God, since “His command is the claim which, when it is made, has power over us, demanding that in all we do we admit that what God does is right and requiring that we give our free obedience to this demand.”⁴⁸⁰ Specifically, God calls humanity through Christ “into a particular fellowship with Himself, thrusting him as His afflicted but well-equipped witness into the service of His prophetic work.”⁴⁸¹ In addressing the possibility that his theology may lead to a universalism in which all of reality is redeemed and

⁴⁷⁶ Calvin, III.xxv.8.

⁴⁷⁷ Case-Winters, *God’s Power*, 68.

⁴⁷⁸ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, III/4, 324.

⁴⁷⁹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I/2, 389.

⁴⁸⁰ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/2, 552.

⁴⁸¹ Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV/3, 481.

united with God, Barth wrote in “The Humanity of God” that “one thing is sure, that there is no theological justification for setting any limits on our side to the friendliness of God towards humanity which appeared in Jesus Christ.”⁴⁸² Barth sees the world as having been called by God to move in obedience to God within the world, leaving open the possibility of the entirety of the world becoming united with Christ in receiving salvation.

In Bowman’s analysis of Barth’s doctrine of election, she at times addresses the movement of the world into God in his theology. Bowman sees Barth as giving humanity the freedom of choice in response to God, albeit with the end consequences being essentially the same no matter what humans choose, writing that although “the response of the human being to God’s act of election is the free act of the creature made possible by God’s gracious sharing of the divine freedom and purpose,” in the end “the difference between these responses is not in their outcome, for God’s freedom and power enables the use of both belief and unbelief to bring about the divine kingdom.”⁴⁸³ The freedom of creation to respond to God’s election thus appears to be limited in Barth’s theology, since “the creature does change its world, but on God’s terms. Barth defines creaturely freedom as the ability to do God’s will, and therefore finds it expressed only in the gracious and divinely powered relationship established in election.”⁴⁸⁴

Case-Winters agrees with Bowman, claiming in *God’s Power* that Barth has redefined what freedom means: “Barth redefines freedom. Freedom consists in obedience to God and thus does not stand in conflict with our being totally ruled and determined by God.”⁴⁸⁵ Thus, Case-Winters says that for Barth “it becomes clear that the creature is an agent only in an instrumental

⁴⁸² Barth, “Humanity of God,” 64.

⁴⁸³ Bowman, 67.

⁴⁸⁴ Bowman, 52.

⁴⁸⁵ Case-Winters, *God’s Power*, 115.

sense, as a tool and not an agent in the usual sense.”⁴⁸⁶ Although Barth does leave room for the world to move in its response of obedience to God, it certainly appears that the world does not have the true freedom of an agent in this response. Through these critiques and Barth’s own theology, his view of the world’s movement into God can be understood as the (limited) freedom of the world to respond to God in obedience to the divine will for service and love.

Guthrie, like Barth, sees the actions humanity can take in response to God’s actions as the primary way in which the world moves. In *Christian Doctrine* he views humanity as not completely helpless and at the whims of God, but rather as having roles for themselves, since as humans “we are creatures God has equipped and empowered to be God’s partners to participate in God’s own work in and for the world. We are ‘junior partners,’ to be sure, but nonetheless true partners whom God has invited and commanded to join God’s ‘business’ of preserving and caring for the world of nature, doing justice and showing compassion in human society.”⁴⁸⁷ Guthrie sees humanity’s faith (and obedience) as the movement of the world that responds to the movement of God’s love into the world: “our faith does not force or enable God to love us, but it is our way of acknowledging, receiving, enjoying – and returning – the love that God had for us before we ever thought of loving God.”⁴⁸⁸ But Guthrie is also careful to highlight that God is the driving force even in the movement of the world’s obedience to God (termed sanctification), since “sanctification is just as much the work of God’s grace as justification. Guthrie understands the world’s movement into God as the sanctification of humanity, brought about through the grace of God, in which individuals can live in obedience to God by showing love and justice to their neighbors.

⁴⁸⁶ Case-Winters, *God’s Power*, 115.

⁴⁸⁷ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 201.

⁴⁸⁸ Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, 323.

Among the many Reformed voices that could be included in a discussion on the movements of the world is the Westminster Larger Catechism, which claims that “the union which the elect have with Christ is the work of God’s grace, whereby they are spiritually and mystically, yet really and inseparably, joined to Christ as their head and husband; which is done in their effectual calling.”⁴⁸⁹ This shows that the Reformed perspective on the world’s movement into God can be understood historically as the joining of humanity to God through Christ.

Bowman claims that through election “creatures are allowed to create themselves in whatever image they desire. This is the power God has graciously fostered in creatures. But God’s power takes the creature’s decision and purifies it in God’s self.”⁴⁹⁰ For her, creatures have true freedom to act as they choose, with the results of their actions having an influence on God as God brings those choices into God’s self. And Case-Winters, in critiquing Barth, sees it as vitally important to understand that there is true freedom and reciprocity moving from the world to God, writing that “if we are not free, we are not responsible. All our willing and acting have no lasting significance. In the final analysis, they are not *our* willing and acting. If God is the only one with real freedom/power, then God is the one responsible for all that is – including evil.”⁴⁹¹ These three Reformed voices combine to suggest that the world’s movement into God requires the true freedom of humanity in order for humanity to be responsible before God, with God using our actions and bringing us into community with the divine self through Christ.

These theologians show that the Reformed tradition sees world’s movement into God as the world’s reconciliation with God, through God’s initiative, and the resulting freedom of humanity to be obedient to God. This movement of the world is shown in Calvin’s understanding of the movement of the faithful into unity with Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. Barth

⁴⁸⁹ “The Larger Catechism,” in Presbyterian, *Confessions*, 7.176.

⁴⁹⁰ Bowman, 208.

⁴⁹¹ Case-Winters, *God’s Power*, 117.

illustrates it as the world's freedom to be obedient to God in love and service. It is seen in Guthrie's understanding that humanity's sanctification by God allows individuals to be obedient to God through their loving and just actions. The other Reformed voices explored view it as true freedom for humanity, which is united with God through Christ. Overall, the Reformed understanding of the world's movement toward God is best seen through the world's joining to Christ and the resulting sanctified freedom to be obedient to God through loving creation.

As with the movements of God into the world, there are significant theological commonalities between process and Reformed theologies when it comes to the world's movement into God. Both process thought and the Reformed tradition consider the movement of the world to be the world's joining with God. In process theology, this is the consequent nature of God, wherein the occasions of the world are received and transformed into God. In the Reformed tradition, it is humanity's adoption by God made possible through the unity of natures in Christ. Although in both traditions it is understood to be God who is the agent of the union between God and the world, it is still a significant movement of the world in both cases, since elements of the world are joined with God.

The movement of the world into God, the salvation of the world, actually represents a point of agreement between the two theologies. Process and Reformed theologians both claim that humanity is brought into unity with God (by God) in order to be restored and made whole in salvation. Although they may have some extremely minor differences in the language used (as expected from their very different philosophical backgrounds), they are in fact both claiming the same thing: that the world is saved by God through being united with God.

A second major commonality, although one in which can also be found significant dissimilarity, is that both theological traditions understand the world as having freedom in

response to God. For process thought, this freedom is the freedom of an occasion to actualize any possibilities before it, which are then resurrected into God's consequent nature. For the Reformed tradition, it is a freedom from sin and for God, a freedom to obey the will of God after the individual has been freed from bondage to sin. These theological similarities in the movements of the world, the joining of elements of the world with God and the freedom of the world in response to God, reflect the same theological insight into the world's relationship with God, as interpreted by two different systems.

Within the theological similarities of the world's movement in the process and Reformed systems, there are also important differences to be found. Both traditions see elements of the world as joining with God, but the influence that this joining has on God is interpreted very differently in process thought and in the Reformed tradition. In process thought, God is seen as being profoundly influenced by the incorporation of the events of the world into God's consequent nature, so much so that God may even be said in some sense to be created by the world. In the Reformed tradition, however, God is essentially unchanged by humanity's joining with God. Humanity alone is changed by its union with God for Reformed thought.

Likewise, the freedom of the world in response to God is interpreted as very different kinds of freedom in the process and Reformed worldviews. For process thought, the freedom of the world is a true freedom in which each occasion is free to decide among any possibilities, including the possibilities presented by God in the initial aim, a freedom that is bound only by the determinism of the past. But for the Reformed tradition, freedom is understood narrowly as freedom to do the will of God. Although the Reformed tradition's emphasis is on freedom for (freedom for God), there is a sense of freedom from something as well, since it is a freedom from the bondage of sin as found in the concept of total depravity. As with the movements of God in

the world, the differences here will be seen to be primarily the result of the different philosophical lenses being used to interpret the traditions' theologies.

Overall, it can be seen that both of these traditions agree that the world moves to become joined with God by God, and that the world exhibits freedom in response to God. Process thought claims that the fullness of the world in its response to God is transformed, received, enjoyed, and resurrected within God's consequent nature, influencing God, and possibly achieving subjective immortality in addition to objective immortality. And the Reformed tradition sees that the world is joined to Christ and has a resulting sanctified freedom to be obedient to God through showing love to creation.

Each tradition highlights a different aspect of the God-world relationship in the world's movements, with process theology focusing more on the world with its influence over God and stressing its actual freedom, while Reformed theology focuses more on God's primacy as agent both in the world's joining to God and in the world's freedom. The differences between the process and Reformed understandings of the world's movements reflect the differing emphases of the different philosophies used by process theology and Reformed theology, and are largely not reflective of differences in the theologies themselves. In process metaphysics, the very structure of reality requires that any actually existing entity has the power of free choice for self-determination within the bounds of its past and what is possible. This means that the freedom of the world in its response to God cannot be mere adherence to the will of God, although it can be a freedom partially conditioned by God through the lure of the initial aim to each occasion. Similarly, since every occasion is bound by its prehensions of the past through its physical pole, so, too, God is bound by the influence of the world through the consequent nature as God's physical pole. Process thought must thus take seriously the influence of the world on God and

the freedom of the world, both of which reflect the theological insight of the world's response to God and joining with God.

In the substance metaphysics of classical Reformed theology, however, there is no framework of a concurring actual occasion. Instead, the language of essence and existence, substance and accidents, etc., requires a different understanding of reality. In this understanding, the nature of humanity, which had become corrupted by sin, is purified by Christ to be joined with God, meaning that the change accompanying the movement of the world here is a change within humanity to purify it to be more like God, a change that requires no subsequent change in God. This understanding of the purification of the nature of humanity is also behind the Reformed tradition's view of freedom, since before justification through Christ human nature is corrupted to be always sinful in all things, while after justification human nature has become purified by God to do the will of God always. Thus, humanity never is understood as having freedom on the level to be found in process thought since by their very nature individuals must either sin or do the will of God in substance metaphysics. Each of these traditions is attempting to explain the same theological insights: that the world becomes joined to God and that the world has freedom in response to God. But in their use of philosophy to interpret these theological insights, they end up with results that look very different from one another, despite being in general agreement on the theological level.

The movements of God and the world in both process thought and the Reformed tradition reflect the same cycle of soteriological movements within the theological system of the God-world relationship. Both of them "begin" (as much as there can be said to be a beginning in an ongoing cycle) in abstract states that are never actualized in the world. This first primordial non-existent state, emphasized more by the Reformed tradition than by process thought, is God and

the world as they would exist independent from one another. But as God and the world are never truly fully separated from one another, this “beginning” of the cycle is only useful in drawing distinctions between God and the world in order to see more clearly the roles each plays within the rest of the soteriological cycle. The second stage of the cycle is the eternally ongoing action of God to bridge the divide between the divine and the rest of reality that has been made distinct by the first stage. Here, God is seen to enter into the world and to use God’s power to bring about the divine will as much as is possible, a will that desires for the best for all of creation. God’s movement into the world in the second stage directly results in the third stage of the soteriological cycle: a state of flourishing reality. In this stage, God’s presence in the world has united with the world so that, although remaining distinct entities, there can be said to be a moment of a God-world state, wherein the world and God are one. Following from the stage of God-world unity comes the fourth and “final” stage, wherein the world is brought into God. This differs from the third stage in that the moment of God-world unity in the previous stage occurs in the world and in a limited fashion, whereas in the fourth stage the unity occurs in God and is a full and everlasting unity. But the soteriological cycle does not end here, with the salvific unity of the world with God, because the God who has been influenced by unity with the world is also the God who constantly moves into the world. Thus, each stage of the cycle is always occurring, and is always influencing the other stages.

The “first” stage of the cycle, the stage of abstract non-actualized states, can be understood in process thought as the primordial nature of God on the one hand, and on the other hand as the idea of a world lacking all novelty. This stage of the cycle requires examination of two concepts, since it is both God and the world, but without any relationship with one another. When leaving aside the lure toward novelty coming from the divine primordial nature, and thus

considering only the primordial nature in itself, it is the realm of all future potentiality, containing within itself the eternal objects but not possessing actuality in itself. On its own, the primordial nature of God is all potentiality and no actuality. It is a non-actualized state that cannot truly exist on its own. On the other hand, a world completely lacking in novelty (if such a thing can even be conceived) would be mere static repetition of the past. Such a universe could never be said to be alive, if it could even exist in the first place since there would never be any novelty to cause the universe to change from a constant static state. Both of these concepts can be found in process thought, although it must be admitted that neither are considered as having ever actually been the case. The primordial nature of God is never divorced from the world, and novelty is never wholly absent from the world. But when considering the abstract non-actualized states of God and the world not in relationship with one another, instead remaining in their own selves, then this is what they would look like in process thought.

The states of God and the world divorced from one another receive much more attention in the Reformed tradition. Here, God's sovereignty and humanity's total depravity are juxtaposed against one another as the two sides divided by a lack of relationship. As with process thought, there is an aspect of God's sovereignty that must be left aside for the moment in order to explore the idea of God independent of creation, since the Reformed tradition understands God's sovereignty as the absolute self-sufficient freedom of God to love creation and to be for humanity. Focusing on the absolute self-sufficient freedom of God shows that for the Reformed theologian, God can be God without the world. Indeed, God would still be in a loving community within the Trinity even without the world, and thus does not need the world for anything. But to argue that God without the world is the same God as God with the world is another matter. If God has chosen to be God-for-us, then necessarily God would be a different

God if there were no world for God to love, even if God is no less God in such a case. Thus, even in the Reformed tradition's understanding of divine sovereignty there is an element in which God-without-the-world is only an abstract non-actualized God, since that is not in fact the God who exists.

When it comes to the world without God, it should be admitted from the outset that in Reformed theology the world would simply never exist without God's power in ongoing providential creation. But aside from this, there is also the concept of total depravity that serves as an insurmountable barrier between humanity and God, at least from the side of the world. Because humanity is totally incapable of doing anything good or approaching any knowledge of God due to original sin and its complete corruption of human nature, humanity is left separated from God. Although even in Reformed theology the case is not actually this hopeless, since God is always present with humanity and able to overcome the barrier of sin (and indeed without God's presence humanity could not exist to be subject to the corruption of sin), total depravity represents what humanity would be like if it existed without the intervention of God. The God who is God-for-us chooses never to be without us, and by God's continual presence with humanity the doctrine of total depravity can never be considered in a vacuum without God, yet an absolutely self-reliant God and a humanity totally depraved by the corruption of sin are the primary ways in which the Reformed tradition conceptualizes God and the world (particularly humanity) divorced from one another.

But how closely do these concepts resemble one another? Is the primordial nature of God and divine sovereignty the same thing? What about total depravity and the world without novelty? There are certainly some resonances among them, but dissonances as well. The primordial nature of God and the Reformed doctrine of absolute sovereignty both represent

something that does not actually exist on its own, but rather exists for the world, directed toward the rest of reality. In this sense, they both reflect the absence of a God who is (or chooses to be) divorced from the world. On their own, they show a God who is not actually the God proclaimed by either tradition, neither the poet of the world nor God-for-us. But that is where their similarity ends. The primordial nature of God is the non-actual locus of the future and all potentiality, whereas the sovereign God is actual, perhaps even the most fully actual entity.

God's sovereignty is a doctrine that represents one of the irreconcilable differences between process thought and the Reformed tradition. Even leaving aside the fact that both traditions agree God is never fully divorced from the world, for process thought divine sovereignty is a lack of actuality, while for the Reformed tradition it is a perfection lacking nothing. For process thought, God's sovereignty makes God incomplete and dependent on the world for actualization of the potentiality of the primordial nature (which in fact makes God holy for process thinkers, since it means that God is intrinsically related to the world). But for Reformed theologians, God's holy sovereignty makes God completely self-sufficient and requiring nothing whatsoever, with God just as much God even if the world did not exist at all. On this point, the two traditions interestingly exhibit a relationship that is almost an inverse of the relation of similarity. Instead of having a theological core in common that is expressed in different language, here there is a similar language (God's sovereign independence from the world) that is being used to reflect two very different realities (God as incomplete versus God as perfectly complete). Even though this is a real difference that will never be reconciled, it must be remembered that for both traditions these forms of sovereignty reflect concepts of God that do not actually exist.

On the other side of the great divide between God and the world, we are left considering total depravity and the world without novelty. In both of these cases, there is tremendous lack in the world, wherein the ultimate goods of the world are unable to be actualized: God's will on the one hand and novelty on the other. But because both God's will and novelty (themselves related to one another) actually occur, here is another case of both being an abstract non-actualized state. Both total depravity and the world without novelty show the painful state of existence that reality would be in without God's ongoing intervention. And when taken to their logical conclusions, both result in a world that could not really be said to exist without God, although the Reformed tradition would argue much more strongly for the complete lack of existence without God. Both theologies agree that the God who exists would not be without the world, and that the world could not exist without God.

Here is a point of similarity between process and Reformed theologies. In their understandings of the world, both traditions claim that the world is reliant upon God for its continued existence. They agree on the fundamental theological proposition that there is a fundamental flaw in the world that needs God's corrective actions in order for reality as we know it to exist. And also for both, God's actions allow the world to respond to God in order to overcome the existential flaw. But they differ in their articulation of the best way to understand the flaw that is overcome. In process thought, the flaw is a static repetition of the past in which novelty never arises, a flaw overcome by God's lure toward novelty allowing for the occasions of the world to enact God's will and to be creative. For Reformed theology, the world (specifically humanity) has become enslaved to sin, unable to do God's will until God, through Christ, frees humanity from the bondage to sin and enables the world to be free to follow God's will. Both of these traditions are in significant agreement on the core theological proposition that

the world is inherently flawed without God and is reliant upon God for the continued existence of reality as we know it. But they disagree on the language used to express this flaw, even if they still end up agreeing on the cure for the flaw through God's entry into the world and the subsequent enabling of the world to enact God's will.

The second stage of the cycle of soteriology is God's movement into the world, the broad brushstrokes of which have already been explored above for both traditions. In the process worldview, God moves into the world through offering the divine lure of the initial aim to each concurring occasion. As seen in chapter one, the divine lure is the initial aim or desire that brings about novelty in the world through the primordial nature of God providing the best possibilities for each occasion. It is God bridging the gap between God and the world that was highlighted by the first stage, a divide that is never actually existent because of this second stage. Through the initial aim, the primordial nature of God presents its potentiality for actualization, and a space is made for novelty to occur within the world. God enters into the world, seeking to bring about the best actualization of each event, the ideal harmony and intensity of each occasion. Only through this movement of God into the world are the abstract non-actualized states of a purely potential God and a static world overcome, through the lure toward novelty in the world that God provides by presenting potentials for actualization.

For the Reformed tradition, God's movement into the world is represented by divine providence. As seen in chapter two, providence is God's sovereign ongoing care for creation, in which the divine power is used to control or guide all things. In the Reformed understanding, the divide between God and the world is automatically overcome by God. Because God has power over all things, and has chosen to be God-for-us, then God will choose to use all the power at God's disposal on behalf of the world. This means that God has chosen to be involved in every

element of reality, and not to be apart from reality. It means that humanity is never stuck in its total depravity, since God is always involved in even the smallest aspects of human life. All Reformed theologians claim this commitment for God: that God has chosen eternally to be involved with the world and to use God's power on behalf of creation.

But depending on the philosophical system being used to interpret this commitment of God's, Reformed theologians will disagree on the extent or mode of power God uses to accomplish God's commitment to the world. Some Reformed theologians argue for God as controlling or determining everything, while a minority prefers to interpret God's power as guiding the world. If God must by nature be the source and locus of all power, then God must logically be seen as controlling and determining all of reality, as is the case when using strict substance metaphysics. But when the theology is left to speak for itself and not enslaved by substance metaphysics, when the revelation of Christ in scripture has a stronger voice than the philosophy used to interpret it, then the Reformed God-for-us who has made a commitment to do everything in God's power to bring about the best possible world is freed from the shackles of power as control and determination. In its place is the power of Christ: the power of suffering love, which is never controlling and can only ever guide the world. God thus bridges the divide separating the non-existent God-without-us from the total depravity of humanity by choosing to be God-for-us, by choosing to be ever-present with the world and to guide reality by the divine will to its best possible future.

There is similarity and difference in the two understandings of God's movement into the world as presented by process thought and the Reformed tradition. The divine lure of process theology and the divine providence of Reformed thought both illustrate God's action in bridging the divide between God and the world, a divide that is real but that never remains as a division.

In both, God is the agent while the world receives and responds to God's actions. But there is a difference between them based on their differing views on the cause of the divide between the world and God. For process thought, God brings novelty into the world to be actualized, since the divide from the first stage is caused by God having all the potential for novelty and the world having no potential for novelty on its own. But in the Reformed tradition, God brings God's self into the world because in the first stage of the cycle the divide is caused by God having all goodness in the divine nature, while the world as totally depraved is left without any of God's righteousness. And although the majority of the Reformed tradition historically claims an absolute control of reality for God, the more Christologically oriented understanding of God's power (inspired by Barth's commitment to Christological epistemology) that is seen in several Reformed theologians is in agreement with process thought that God's work in the world is one of influence and guidance.

The similarities seen in this stage reflect the formal similarities in the doctrines of providence and total depravity that have already been explored above. Despite treating slightly different ailments in the world, for both traditions the ailment begins to be solved by God's entry into the world through God's influence and guidance, understood either as the divine lure or as divine providence. But within the similarity of providence there is another doctrinal similarity to be found between the two traditions: God's power. When the Reformed tradition understands God's power to be exemplified by the kenotic Christ (which is suggested if we follow Barth's Christological emphasis), then Reformed theologians, through the example of Christ, understand God as having the power of a suffering servant, not the omnipotent control and determination that has often dominated Reformed theology. In this case, both traditions agree with the theological proposition that we understand God and God's power best through the kenotic Christ,

a Christ who lovingly suffers alongside creation. But they differ in their understanding of the cause of Christ's kenosis. As with several other points of similarity, the disagreement within this similarity comes down to an understanding of whether Christ is the way that Christ is because of a metaphysical necessity (process thought's claim), or if it is the result of a choice of God (as the Reformed tradition claims). Despite this minor difference of understanding on causality, both traditions importantly and rightly agree that Christ, as the suffering servant, is who we should look to in order to see who God is and what God's power is like.

The next stage of the soteriological cycle being explored is termed the state of flourishing reality. It receives this term because it represents those moments wherein the world lives up to its fullest potential by being an embodiment of God and the world united together. It is reality flourishing by momentarily uniting with God. In process thought, this is seen most clearly when the divine lure is followed and novelty appears in the world, but it can also be seen in a more Christian sense through the process conceptualization of Christ. As previously analyzed, for process thought novelty is the incarnation of creativity as the radically new emerges in occasions. God, as the primordial creature and orderer of creativity, is thus also incarnated in novel occasions. When the divine lure is followed by an occasion, novelty arises from the static repetition of the past. Reality continues to move and advance, to flourish, because of these countless moments wherein the world enacts the divine potential presented to it. In the world's response to God, the flourishing of reality moves beyond potentiality and achieves actuality. The process understanding of Christ is another way of speaking about this reality, as Christ is the revelation of God representing God's love in the world through the incarnation of creative transformation, seen particularly emphasized in Jesus Christ. As the revelation of God, Christ shows the world God's will, the divine lure for every moment, and as creative transformation,

Christ is the incarnation of novelty in the world. Thus there can be said to be an association between Christ and novelty in process theology, since Christ is the incarnation of novelty in the world. Both Christ and novelty indicate the incarnation in the world of the potentiality of God being enacted by the world's occasions, although for the sake of clarity the term novelty will be used when comparing this reality to the Reformed tradition's understanding of Christ.

The state of flourishing reality, in which God is embodied by the world, is found in Jesus Christ for Reformed theology. Especially for Barth, for whom Christ is the absolute center of all history and all theology, there can be no state of flourishing reality apart from Jesus Christ. The Reformed tradition understands Christ to be an unmixed unity of God and humanity, who provides salvation through revealing God to humanity and reconciling humanity to God. In Christ is the one example of the absolute full incarnation of God in the world. Through this embodiment of God as human, God is revealed to all of humanity, and all of creation is able to do God's will and be reconciled to God. In the second stage of the soteriological cycle God crossed the divide to be present with the world, but in this third step God becomes known and enables the flourishing of reality. In Christ, God becomes fully incarnate, and through that incarnation opens up the possibility for the rest of the world to join God through justification and to serve God through sanctification. Jesus Christ is thus the ultimate state of flourishing reality in Reformed theology, but through Christ humanity and the rest of the world are able to flourish similarly in imitation of Christ.

Both process thought and the Reformed tradition exhibit a state of flourishing reality, in which God is embodied by the world. But there are significant differences in how this state is envisioned. From the process perspective, there is widespread enactment of God in the world wherever novelty appears, resulting in the state of flourishing reality as found potentially

anywhere. For the Reformed tradition, however, the state of flourishing reality is centralized within Jesus Christ as its ultimate and fullest expression. While Reformed theology still has room for the flourishing of the rest of reality too as it is united to God and does God's will, this is only possible because of the definitive and ultimate state achieved by Jesus Christ. Process theologians highlight the possibility of the appearance of the God-world state in any time and place while Reformed theologians continually point back to Christ as its ultimate expression. Process theology and Reformed thought both provide an understanding of the moment wherein God's presence and will is fully felt and made manifest in the world, acknowledging it as possible anywhere. But Reformed theologians seem to add in an extra step first, requiring its full expression in Jesus Christ before it can be seen elsewhere. And process theologians certainly have a space for Christ in this stage as well, understanding Christ to be present wherever there is novelty, but not with the heavy emphasis laid upon it by the Reformed tradition.

In their understandings of Christ, process and Reformed theologies are actually exhibiting a point of agreement between their traditions. For both, Christ reveals God to the world and reconciles the world to God, is free to be present in any time and place, and is found embodied particularly in Jesus of Nazareth. This is a significant agreement on a major theological doctrine, an agreement that overshadows their minor differences in emphasis when it comes to articulating the ontological and epistemological priority of Christ in every moment versus Christ as most fully and authoritatively present in Jesus (especially since both agree Christ is importantly present in both cases anyway).

The Reformed tradition's reliance on substance metaphysics for interpreting its theology can explain the difference in emphasis found within this agreement between the two traditions: the Reformed tradition's requirement of Christ's embodiment of God before the possibility of the

rest of reality's flourishing. In order for a fallen human nature to be capable of following God's will and being united with God, that nature must be changed, and the only way it can be changed is by God through Jesus Christ. Thus, because of its bondage to substance metaphysics, the Reformed tradition must emphasize Christ as the sole incarnation of God, even though it also allows for creation to be united to God and to enact God's will. By removing the substance metaphysics, Jesus Christ can still be seen through the revelation of God as the key to understanding how God can be embodied in the world. But instead of being the sole state of reality's flourishing, Jesus would be seen as one among many places where God through Christ is embodied in the world, albeit the fullest and most authoritative instance. Once removed from the shackles of substance metaphysics, both process thought and the Reformed tradition can proudly claim together that flourishing reality, wherein God through Christ is manifest in the events of the world, can be found in any time and place where the world responds positively to God's call.

The "final" stage of the soteriological cycle is the world being brought into everlasting unity with God, a unity that is prefigured in the previous stage's momentary God-world unity within the world. For process theology, this is conceptualized as the consequent nature of God. As has been previously analyzed, the consequent nature is the transformation and reception of every experience of the world in its synthetic unification as it is felt by God, allowing God both to save the world and to present the best possible initial aims to the world. In the consequent nature, God prehends the world, receiving every occasion of the world into the divine self and transforming the world into a unity within God. The evils of the world are trivialized as the world is resurrected within God's everlasting concrescence. God and the occasions of the world are thereby joined together, with the world having a profound influence on God. This influence

carries through into the initial aim of each occasion, as seen in Whitehead's fourth phase of the cosmic process, which makes it clear that the consequent nature too is part of the initial aim presented to each occasion. Thus, the final stage of the soteriological cycle in fact is intimately related to the second stage, wherein God moves into the world. Through the consequent nature of God, process theology perceives God as being alongside the world, bringing the world into God's very self, wherein both God and the world are transformed by the encounter, leading directly to God's renewed movement into the world through the initial aim.

The Reformed understanding of God bringing the world into unity with the divine is found in the doctrine of election. The Reformed doctrine of election, as examined above, is one of the primary doctrines of the Reformed tradition, centered on Christ, in which God determines who God and humanity will be and in which God brings humanity into salvation and the divine plan. Election is God choosing to unite elements of creation with God's self through Christ, granting salvation to those chosen. For some, like Calvin, this means a select few. Yet for others, like Barth and Guthrie, the door is open for a universal choice by God to unite all of reality in salvation. But election is not just predestination given a different name. It also includes God's choice to include creation in the divine plan for reality, using humanity to help bring about the best possible world. Perhaps even more importantly, election also includes God's choice to be God-for-us, meaning that this stage of the cycle of soteriology includes within it the second stage, wherein God moves into the world as the loving God of the world. In the doctrine of election, God through Christ chooses for creation to be reconciled to and united with God eternally and also chooses to be united eternally to creation through being God-for-us.

The soteriological cycle ends and begins anew with the fourth stage, in which the world is brought into God. This is seen in process thought as the consequent nature of God and in the

Reformed tradition as the doctrine of election. There are several similarities to be found in these two concepts. Both of them reflect an everlasting or eternal union of God with resurrected elements of the world, both give the agency of the movement to God, and both of them connect this stage of the cycle with the first actually existent stage of the cycle, wherein God moves into the world. For both of them, God transforms and saves the world by joining it with God's self. And for both of them, God becomes who God is because of this stage.

But there are important differences between the consequent nature and election. All of reality, every single occasion, is unquestionably united with God through the consequent nature, but the Reformed doctrine of election has often been reserved for a select few, and almost always emphasizes humanity over the rest of creation. The level of unity the world receives also differs between the two, since in the consequent nature the transformed occasions of the world can be said to constitute or create God, while in election humanity is elevated to being God-like through the union of divine and human natures in Jesus Christ. A final major difference between the two is in how they relate to the second stage of the cycle, with the consequent nature, itself forged from the occasions of the world, bringing a transformed world back into the world through the initial aim, while in election God remains the sole actor, choosing to be God-for-us in Christ while simultaneously choosing to elect the world through Christ.

Taking these similarities and differences into account, election here represents a point of doctrinal similarity between the two traditions. In both the process and Reformed understandings of election, God gives to the world the gift of God and the resurrected world, transforming and saving the world while determining who God is. They agree on the theological proposition that in election, in the consequent nature, God transforms and saves the world through uniting it with God's self, while in the same action creating God as God will be in

relationship with the world. Despite this profound agreement, they disagree on whether the action taken by God in election is necessary or voluntary. For process theologians, God resurrects the world into God's self and is in turn transformed and determined by the world through the necessarily relational nature of reality. But for Reformed theologians, God's resurrection of the world and choice to be God-for-us is entirely freely chosen by God. Process thought and the Reformed tradition exhibit similarity in their doctrines of election, agreeing that in one action God resurrects the world and chooses who God and the world will be, but they disagree on whether or not to understand this action as a metaphysical necessity or as the free choice of God.

The substance metaphysics traditionally used by Reformed theology is seen to be the explanation of most, but not all, of these differences in the fourth stage. The level of unity between God and the world in the Reformed tradition is directly related to substance metaphysics. The nature of humanity has been changed through Christ's union of natures, which is why humanity is given preferential treatment in Reformed soteriology, and why humanity can only be united to God to the extent that Christ's metaphysical transformation of human nature explains the union. Since the rest of humanity obviously is not God, the result of Christ's transformation of human nature means that humanity can be joined to God, but does not in any way constitute the unique divine nature. And because of this view that preserves the uniqueness of the divine nature, the world cannot truly influence who God is without God's choosing, meaning that God must always be the sole actor of the second stage of the cycle, where God chooses to be God-for-us. Without its reliance on substance metaphysics, Reformed theology would be able to have a more transformative and salvific resurrection of the world in unity with God, similar to process theology's understanding. One area of disagreement that the difference in

philosophical lens does not account for, however, is the scope of salvation in the Reformed tradition, which is instead a debate relying on differing passages of scripture. While at its roots the tradition has emphasized the salvation of a limited number of humans, over time the emphasis has seemed to be shifting towards a wider or more universalist understanding of salvation, like the one found in process theology.

These, then, are the movements of the cycle of soteriology that can be seen in both process thought and the Reformed tradition. In the first stage or movement, God and the world are envisioned without the other in a total lack of relationship. These abstract non-actualized states see God as the primordial nature alone or as the absolutely self-sufficient sovereign God, and see the world as lacking all novelty or as totally depraved through the corruption of sin. For both traditions, these states are never actually existent since God bridges the gap between God and the world.

The second stage of the cycle is the first stage that actually exists, the one in which God moves into the world. This is the divine lure of the initial aim and the loving providence of God, both of which illustrate God as guiding the world along the divine plan toward the best possible world. But merely entering into the world is not enough to save the world, as there must be a unity between God and the world, which is reflected in the remaining stages.

The next stage, the third, is that of the momentary union of God and the world within the world. The arising of novelty in the world on the one hand, and Jesus Christ on the other, are the moments where the world embodies God. Jesus Christ may be God's definitive incarnation in the world for Christians, but God is not limited to the life of Jesus of Nazareth. The world is capable of enacting God wherever God's will is done, wherever transformative novelty arises.

The fourth stage, which moves immediately back into the second stage and is thus never a final stage, is God bringing the world into everlasting unity within God's self. This stage is seen in the consequent nature of God and in the doctrine of election. Both are the transformative resurrection of the world as the world is joined to God by God's agency, and both are also an integral part of God's movement into the world, as they are part of the initial aim and are God's choice to be God-for-us. Thus the cycle never stops, with God simultaneously always overcoming the abstract divorced states by moving into the world, always being enacted by the world, and always everlastingly joining the world to God's self.

Through exploring the similar movements of God and the world in a cycle of soteriology, several areas have been made clear where process and Reformed theologians are in agreement, where they exhibit similarities, and where they have irreconcilable differences. As seen above, the two traditions are in agreement on three points of doctrine. They agree that God is ontologically distinct from the rest of reality. They agree that the salvation of the world is found through unity with God's nature. And they agree that Christ reveals God and reconciles the world to God, with Christ seen especially in Jesus of Nazareth. On each of these points, they agree in the content of their statements and in how they say them (even if it is admitted that their language is nuanced slightly differently).

So far, five doctrinal similarities have been explored. Both traditions make similar statements reflecting the theological core that God is influenced by the world, but they differ from one another because process thought sees this influence as a metaphysical necessity, whereas for Reformed theologians it is a voluntary choice of God to be for the world that allows God to be influenced. They both agree with the theological proposition that God guides and accompanies the world, providing for the world's ongoing existence, but they express God's

guidance differently as God's influence of the world in process thought or God's control and determination of the world in the Reformed tradition. They agree on the theological core idea that through the suffering love of Christ we can see who God is and how God's power operates in the world, but they differ in their understanding of why Christ works in the world in this way: whether the kenotic Christ is a metaphysical necessity as process thought claims, or whether Christ's kenosis is a voluntary choice of God. Both traditions also agree that the world has a fundamental lack that needs God for correction, but disagree in the language used to articulate the world's lack: static repetition of the past for process thinkers as opposed to bondage to sin for Reformed theologians. And they have similar stances in affirming the doctrinal proposition of election, that God resurrects the world while simultaneously determining who God and the world can be, but they differ in expressing this proposition because for process thought this reflects a metaphysical necessity of relationality found in the consequent nature of God, while for the Reformed tradition it is the voluntary free choice of God.

In the movements of God and the world explored above, there has been one point of irreconcilable difference that has been addressed: divine sovereignty. Although both traditions have a similar moment in their cycles wherein a non-existent, abstract God can be said to exist without the world, either as the primordial nature of God or as God in Godself, the two Gods here envisioned are radically different. The sovereign God of process thought lacks all actuality, and thus does not truly exist without the world (even if the primordial nature does not presuppose the world). But the sovereign God of the Reformed tradition is the most actual being in existence, perfect and in need of nothing. Both traditions may have a concept of a sovereign God, but what sovereignty means for them is fundamentally different. Despite this significant difference, the many areas of agreement and similarity enable the discussion to continue.

This leads directly to the hypothesis being tested by this dissertation: that despite the differences between process thought and the Reformed tradition, it is possible to arrive at a single statement of a process-Reformed cycle of soteriology that collaboratively brings together both traditions and is sympathetic to both. This hypothetical process-Reformed cycle of soteriology must be one with which both process and Reformed theologians could be in agreement. Thus, it attempts to reflect the insights of process thought and the Reformed tradition, albeit leaving aside any interpretations based on substance metaphysics. The statement of a process-Reformed cycle of soteriology that has been arrived at is that *God does not exist apart from the world, with both God and the world in static absolute states, but rather God moves into the world through God's omnipotent loving providential lure, resulting in the possibility of the world's enactment of God through the appearance of Christ's creative transformation, culminating in God resurrecting the world into everlasting unity within God's self by election into the consequent nature, which simultaneously is also God's movement into the world.* This is a soteriological statement that both process and Reformed theologians can endorse, although admittedly with some careful analysis beforehand and with some differing emphases.

In order to unpack this process-Reformed soteriological statement, it is necessary to define clearly the terms and concepts involved, which will undoubtedly cause some theologians from both traditions to disagree with the statement. Starting at the beginning, it is claimed that "God does not exist apart from the world." This is a simple fact. God is influenced by the world and is in a relationship with the world. God is God-for-us. Whether this is a metaphysical necessity or a voluntary choice is a matter of debate, which is why this particular phrase is used, since it can be accepted by either side. Although the difference between necessity and choice can largely be set aside (since they both result in the same reality), I would argue that in this case

they actually reflect the same idea. God's choice is a metaphysical necessity (even to God), and the metaphysical necessity of relationality is what God chooses. By the world's very existence, God must be related to the world by metaphysical necessity, just as God has chosen to be.

The next phrase of the process-Reformed statement that must be examined closely is "God's omnipotent loving providential lure." At first, this may appear to be an inappropriate combination of terms from process thought and the Reformed tradition. But with a closer look, it will become apparent that the terms helpfully and importantly are used to interpret one another. Process theology is right to have an aversion to the word omnipotence, at least as it is often used to mean complete control and determination of reality. But that is not how it is being used here, as can be seen from the inclusion of the terms "loving" and "lure." Instead, this omnipotence is redefined along the lines seen above wherein Case-Winters carefully explores omnipotence from within the process tradition, arriving at an understanding that God is omnipotent because God has the "capacity to be influenced by all and to influence all."⁴⁹² This is important to recognize not only because it changes the mode of omnipotent power from control to influence, but it also prioritizes the potential to be influenced before the power to influence others. Thus, this omnipotence is not only interpreted as all-powerful, but also as all-potentiality. God is omnipotent through God's inexhaustible potentiality to be influenced, in addition to God's possession of the greatest scope of power that is conceivable: the ability to influence all things. This redefinition of omnipotence as influence takes into account the term "lure." But the terms "loving" and "providential" come into play in this understanding because they make it clear that God's omnipotent lure is guided by God's love for the world and God's ongoing acts in providing for the world. Taking all four of these terms together, then, means that God is

⁴⁹² Case-Winters, *God's Power*, 211.

constantly lovingly reacting to the entirety of reality by providing for the world through influencing and guiding it towards its most positive possibilities.

“Christ’s creative transformation” is another phrase that needs to be defined carefully. Here, Christ is understood to have the potential to be present anywhere and everywhere, and is made incarnate wherever there is an occurrence of creative transformation, which can also be understood to be the will of God. God as Christ is found everywhere throughout reality and is free to be present authoritatively in any time and place. It is important to note here that the term Christ is being used since it is coming from a Christian context, but other terms may be more appropriate in other circumstances. Christians identify this aspect of God to be Christ, and see Christ as having a particularly important presence in Jesus of Nazareth (though not exclusively to the point that Christ cannot be present elsewhere). But God is free to be God anywhere, not just in Jesus or in the Christian term of Christ. Wherever the will of God is followed and creative transformation appears, wherever the world enacts God, that is where Christ is present in the world.

Finally, the phrase “resurrecting the world into everlasting unity within God’s self by election into the consequent nature” must also be understood clearly. This is God’s transformation of the world as God brings the world into salvific unity with God’s very self. “Resurrection” is the most appropriate term to signify this state of transformed salvific unity. Election is the action by which God chooses to transformativelyprehend the world, harmonizing all of reality in unity with God. The consequent nature is mentioned here in order to show the philosophical explanation of the ongoing theological event of resurrection. This concept is summarized in its entirety by the phrase “resurrecting the world into everlasting unity within God’s self,” and does not actually need “by election into the consequent nature” added on to the

end. But they have been added in order to help understand the mechanisms by which God resurrects the world. It is also these mechanisms, election and the consequent nature, which simultaneously express God's movement into the world in the first place. God's election of reality in the consequent nature is also God's election of who God is and will be, giving the transformed unity to God's self in order to give it right back to the world in God's omnipotent loving providential lure.

From the perspective of process thought, there are particular aspects that will be highlighted by each stage of the cycle. When considering the abstract non-actualized states of God and the world, process thinkers will emphasize the fact that these states do not exist because they could not exist in the relational worldview of process thought. It is metaphysically impossible for God and the world to exist completely independent from one another. This insight is endorsed by the process-Reformed statement's opening claim that "God does not exist apart from the world" (and its implied reciprocal claim that the world does not exist without God).

In God's movement into the world, process theology emphasizes God's power of influence on every occasion, presenting one possibility among others. It is by no means a foregone conclusion that what will be done is God's will in a process worldview. The process-Reformed statement reflects this insight by including language of the divine lure and by claiming that the world's enactment of God is only a possibility that results from God's movement into the world, not an automatic result.

In the state of flourishing reality, the world's enactment of God, process theology views the actualization of the potentiality of God presented in the divine lure to be found anywhere where the initial aim is followed and novelty arises, a decentralized incarnation of God in the world. This insight is found in the process-Reformed statement through the language of "the

world's enactment of God" and by using Cobb's concept of creative transformation as where the novelty of God arises.

And when exploring the concept of God bringing the world into God's self in the consequent nature, process thought emphasizes the transformation of all reality within God's self, which in turn transforms and forms God, even as God appears in the initial aim. By using the term "resurrection," which implies transformation, within God's very self, the statement on a process-Reformed cycle of soteriology incorporates this insight of process thought. Although process theologians will emphasize certain aspects at each stage, they can agree with Reformed theologians on the truth of the process-Reformed cycle of soteriology as it is explored here.

A consequence of dialoguing with the Reformed tradition and creating a process-Reformed collaboration is that elements of process thought that often go neglected come to the forefront. Although mainstream process theology often emphasizes the opposite, the Reformed tradition brings out many of Reformed theology's characteristic traits within process thought: God's uniqueness, sovereignty, and providential control of reality. There are threads within process thought that appeal to each of these emphases. As seen in chapter one, God is certainly unique in process thought, being an everlasting concrescence in which there is a reversal of poles and inversion of processes, capable of including all things and providing God's own initial aim. God can also be seen as sovereign, particularly through the primordial nature, but also in the consequent nature, since it is through God's own effort that a transformed world enters God's self (not necessarily the world itself). Although it must be recognized here that this sovereignty is one that still requires the existence of the world in general, unlike the Reformed tradition's potentially isolated sovereignty. And God providentially guides reality by being the source of every moment's concrescence through providing the initial aim. God creates the space for the

world to create itself, guiding the world while upholding it and continuing its living existence. The process understanding of God is certainly not as impassible or self-sufficient as classical Reformed theology's God, but through dialogue the process God is highlighted as uniquely divine in ways often relegated to the margins of process thought.

The Reformed tradition presents a perspective that focuses on other aspects of the cycle of soteriology, but which can also agree with process thought on the process-Reformed statement. Unlike process thought's emphasis that God cannot exist apart from the world, the Reformed tradition would argue that God chooses not to exist apart from the world. Although this is an important distinction, it is one that is largely rendered moot by the fact that both agree that God does not exist apart from the world, that there has never been a God who did not exist for and alongside the world. Regardless of whether or not God could exist without the world if God so chose, it is a plain fact of reality for Reformed theology that God did not choose to exist without the world, thus excluding the possibility of God-without-us from reality. The insight of Reformed theology that God chooses never to be without the world is reflected by the statement's claim that "God does not exist without the world."

With the Reformed tradition's emphasis on God's omnipotent control of reality, it may seem at first glance that the language of God's "lure" is far too weak to be considered as the method by which providence is enacted. But if, as seen above, the Reformed tradition fully follows its own Christocentric emphasis, then it will have to reconsider omnipotence along Christocentric lines to be a power of guiding and influence rather than that of control and determination. Some of the Reformed theologians explored have begun this reconsideration of omnipotence, which is in general agreement with process theology that God has the most power that is conceivable for God to have while other free beings exist, influencing all things to guide

and care for them providentially by God's will. This insight of the Reformed tradition, that God lovingly provides for creation using the most power possible for any being to have, is reflected in the process-Reformed statement through the inclusion of "God's omnipotent loving providential lure," although it must be recognized that omnipotence here means omnipotence of influence rather than omnipotence of determination.

The result of God's movement into the world, the state of flourishing reality, is centered in the Reformed tradition on Jesus Christ as fully human and fully God. While the rest of the world is certainly capable of embodying God's will and being joined to God, it is only possible through the uniqueness of Christ. The process-Reformed statement takes account of this insight by making clear that the enactment of God (God's will) is through the appearance of Christ.

When it comes to God bringing the world into unity with God's self through election, the Reformed tradition highlights God's agency in choosing to give resurrection and choosing to determine who God is. Although unity with God to the extent of process theology's consequent nature is denied by substance metaphysics, once Reformed theology moves beyond this philosophical obstacle it is open to the salvific unity between God and the world that Christ represents. After leaving behind substance metaphysics, the idea of reality being transformed and brought into God's very self is an appealing conceptualization of reconciliation and resurrection for the Reformed tradition. But the primary remaining difference, one that also appeared in God's movement into the world, is the fact that for Reformed theology it is God's choice, rather than a metaphysical necessity, that compels the movement. And as before, the difference becomes largely moot when considered more deeply, for once God makes the choice of election, both of God's self and of the world, then the result becomes a metaphysical necessity. God will always be who God has chosen to be, thus making God's choice the equivalent of a metaphysical

necessity. The insight of God's simultaneous choice to be God-for-us and to resurrect the world (or elements of it) is found in the process-Reformed cycle of soteriology statement by language such as "God's resurrecting the world" and "by election." After leaving behind the impairment of substance metaphysics, Reformed theology can fully agree with the process-Reformed cycle of soteriology as it is seen here.

At this point it is helpful to show exactly why substance metaphysics can and should be abandoned by Reformed theology. At its heart, substance metaphysics is a philosophy that sees reality as composed of individual isolated units or monads. These monads can have relationships, but they are external relationships. This is because relationships are accidental and not part of the substance that makes something what it truly is. Through substance metaphysics and its emphasis on individual substances and essences, dualisms of several kinds arise that problematize philosophy and theology. Among these dualisms are subject-object, mind-body, God-world, etc. When substance metaphysics is used by theology, it results in an understanding of the God-world relationship that is inadequate to experienced reality. Whenever the terms classical theology or classical theism have been used in this project, it is referring to theology that makes use of this kind of substance metaphysics as its guiding philosophy.

Process thought is strongly opposed to substance metaphysics. The most important critique from process philosophy is that the world is actually profoundly relational, and thus substance metaphysics's concept of isolated monads only accidentally related to other units of reality is inherently false, eroding the very foundation of substance metaphysics. This allows process thought to overcome many of the dualisms that result from substance metaphysics. There are also areas in which the Reformed tradition can critique substance metaphysics, showing that it needs a new philosophical interpretive lens. If Christ's life and message truly point the way to

who God is and how God acts in the world (as suggested by Barth's Christological epistemology), then God really is the loving God fundamentally in relation with humanity and the world. Rather than the scandal of incarnation found in substance metaphysics wherein God must become un-Godlike in order to be present in Jesus, instead Jesus Christ should be interpreted as the guide to understanding what it means to be Godlike. Substance metaphysics keeps that from happening. Additionally, God has chosen to be God-for-us, and has instructed humanity to care for and love one another. This shows the profound relationality that is present in reality, a relationality that is denied by substance metaphysics. Process thought and the Reformed tradition can rightly join together in their opposition of substance metaphysics.

When substance metaphysics is left behind, there are significant shifts in how theological insights are expressed, as can be seen at several points above. Divine sovereignty shifts from being a perfection of the completely self-sufficient God to become a lack in God that needs the relationship offered by the world in order to be complete. God's providential power in the world is voluntary control and determination of all things in substance metaphysics, but becomes a necessarily relational power of influence when the dualisms and isolated substances are left behind. Election shifts from being an eternal decision made before time to becoming an ongoing necessity of the profoundly interrelated world. The influence of the world on God moves away from substance metaphysics's external relationship that is God's choice, instead becoming a necessary result of reality's relational nature. Even the fundamental flaw of the world, what could be termed as sin, shifts from substance metaphysics's understanding of breaking God's will and instead through the interconnectedness of all reality becomes about actions that bring about harm to any aspect of reality, not enacting the best possibilities, because harm to any part of the great web of reality is harm to all of it. Another shift can be seen when it comes to eschatology,

with substance metaphysics proclaiming an end-time event where God will use God's unilateral controlling power to enact God's final will, while leaving this philosophical lens behind results in a shift of God's power such that eschatology becomes focused on the redemption and transformation of the world in every moment. And when it comes to interreligious dialogue, substance metaphysics can only offer a form of inclusivism wherein the essence of what is true may appear in other traditions with its accidents changed, but process thought offers a deep pluralism in which competing truths can be held alongside one another.

Although some of these are areas in which the Reformed tradition cannot follow (such as sovereignty, eschatology, and interreligious dialogue), the remaining topics are all theological shifts that are useful for Reformed theologians, shifts that should be taken. Because of a handful of irreconcilable differences between the two traditions as they currently exist, Reformed theology cannot use the entirety of process thought as its interpretive framework while still remaining Reformed. If process thought were compared to Reformed theology at its beginnings it would find even more points of irreconcilable difference, thus it is conceivable that over time future developments may bring them still closer together. If the Reformed tradition continues to value what truly matters to it and leaves aside the periphery as it moves into the future, it may one day be possible for a process-Reformed collaboration to resemble a process-Reformed synthesis or integration instead. But we are not yet at that point. Rather, process thought can offer to the current Reformed tradition the core ideas of a new philosophical lens and helpfully guide Reformed theology in the right direction.

Through this dialogue and collaboration, the Reformed doctrines of sovereignty and total depravity have been influenced to be understood in new, positive ways. Instead of being seen as God's absolute self-sufficiency that is impassibly separated from the world, sovereignty can be

understood along the lines of the primordial nature of God as God's relatively independent existence, which is never fully removed from the world because God always chooses to be God-for-us. God's sovereignty, like the primordial nature, implies God's movement into the world by its very definition. And total depravity, the other abstract non-actual state of existence, is no longer the enslavement of human nature by the complete corruption of sin. Rather, it has been influenced by process thought to become the free choice of humanity in responding to God, recognizing that without God, humanity (and all of reality) would be stuck in a static or meaningless world. Both of these doctrines still maintain the core of their Reformed theology as it appeared at the end of chapter two, with sovereignty showing the absolutely reliability that God will always be who God has chosen to be, and with total depravity making it obvious that humanity cannot accomplish what needs to be done, but rather must rely on God. The Reformed theological core, based on revelation in scripture, is then interpreted using process thought instead of substance metaphysics. The result is doctrines that are more life-giving and adequate for our experienced reality.

The Reformed doctrine of providence has likewise been reinterpreted by dialogue with process thought. Instead of God's absolute deterministic control over all of reality to bring about the divine will for all things, God is seen instead as lovingly guiding reality to help bring about the divine will. Rather than violating the will and power of creatures as was traditionally the case in Reformed theology, process thought allows the tradition to follow the Christocentric emphasis championed most strongly by Barth in order to see God's power as modeled on the love of Christ. The core of the Reformed doctrine of providence, which is that God is continually and lovingly providing for creation, is firmly held onto. But instead of being a tyrannical dictator worse than any we can imagine who completely determines the actions of one's subjects, God

instead can be seen through the Reformed tradition's use of process thought as a God who loves the world and has confidence in the world as a covenantal partner, guiding the world as it co-creates with God.

Dialogue with process thought has also resulted in a reformation of the Reformed doctrine of election. It is still God's self-determining choice and the choice to include creation in the divine, both in unity with the divine self and in enacting the divine plan. But how it is understood has changed significantly. Instead of being a timeless decision centered on Christ in which the destinies and earthly actions of all individuals is predetermined, election occurs in every moment in response to the world. There still remains one quasi-timeless element, however, in that God everlastingly elects to be God-for-us. But in electing creation, God can now be seen as choosing to resurrect all of creation in transformative unity with the divine self, which in turn influences the choice of possibilities opened to the world in God's providential care. The core of the Reformed theological understanding of election is that it is the decision of who God will be and of who humanity can be. After being influenced by process thought instead of by substance metaphysics, this core remains. In election, God everlastingly and simultaneously chooses to be God-for-us and chooses to open up the best possibilities for all of reality based on the ongoing choice of God to receive and transform the world.

Thus, both process and Reformed theologies are influenced by their agreement on the process-Reformed statement that God does not exist apart from the world, with both God and the world in static absolute states, but rather God moves into the world through God's omnipotent loving providential lure, resulting in the possibility of the world's enactment of God through the appearance of Christ's creative transformation, culminating in God resurrecting the world into everlasting unity within God's self by election into the consequent nature, which simultaneously

is also God's movement into the world. They emphasize different aspects of this cycle, with process theologians highlighting the relationality necessary to reality, while Reformed theologians focus on God's freedom and agency. But there is room for both of these emphases to be held together, as the process-Reformed cycle of soteriology does. This does not resolve the differences between the two traditions, particularly when it comes to whether God chooses to be in relationship with the world or if it is a metaphysical necessity, but the process-Reformed soteriological collaboration represents an important step in bringing together the insights of these two theologies, seeing their significant commonality despite their competing languages, while acknowledging the areas of difference where they can learn from one another and be mutually transformed.

Alone, no one theology is capable of capturing the fullness of God. Undoubtedly, some theologies are closer to the mark than others, but given the human element of theology no single system will ever encapsulate all of the reality of God. Thus, theological traditions, like that of process theology and of the Reformed tradition, must always be in dialogue with one another. In areas of general agreement, such as the process-Reformed cycle of soteriology, the two can receive a degree of confirmation in their understanding of God, while in areas of disagreement or differing emphases they can grow and learn from one another. As seen above, there is similarity and difference to be found among process and Reformed theologians in their understandings of God's movement into the world, the world's movement into God, and in the four stages of the cycle of soteriology. Many of these differences were caused by the Reformed tradition's misguided reliance on substance metaphysics that has impaired some Reformed theologians by forcing theology to take a backseat to philosophy, which should be used instead to interpret the theology. Even after being freed from substance metaphysics, however, the Reformed tradition

still has its unique emphases that mark it as distinct from process thought. Despite these differences, it can be claimed that the hypothetical process-Reformed cycle of soteriology has been confirmed. Inappropriately borrowing language from the scientific method, the hypothesis can now tentatively be called a theory. Through confirmation of the process-Reformed cycle of soteriology, the goal of this project's thesis has been achieved: by bringing the process thought exemplified by Alfred North Whitehead into dialogue with Reformed theology as seen in Karl Barth and Shirley Guthrie, the problematic Reformed soteriological concepts of divine sovereignty, total depravity, divine providence, and election can be understood in more adequate terms for the world in which we live through the lens of process thought's conceptions of novelty and divine natures, while also providing process thought with points of commonality and with unique emphases through dialogue with the Reformed tradition since they are both reflecting the same soteriological cycle of movements in the God-world relationship.

Chapter Four

Objections to a Process-Reformed Cycle of Soteriology

Not everyone will agree with the thesis of this dissertation. Although in general both process thought and the Reformed tradition can agree on the process-Reformed cycle of soteriology explored in the previous chapter, there will still be objections to this collaboration of the process and Reformed traditions, and there are still areas of dissonance remaining between the two theological traditions. These objections and dissonances come from both sides of the dialogue, with theologians on both sides likely to voice one or more of these potential objections. Although the major objections of process and Reformed theologians will be overcome, this does not mean that they completely agree, as will be seen from the remaining dissonances that are lessened but held as real differences between the two traditions.

Throughout this dialogue, it has been seen that many of the major themes of the Reformed tradition have proven to be particularly problematic for process thought, at least as these doctrines have been traditionally understood using substance metaphysics. Donald G. Bloesch's "Process Theology and Reformed Dialogue," in Donald McKim's *Major Themes in the Reformed Tradition*, highlights the apparent enmity between the Reformed tradition and process thought by writing that for process thinkers "it is the Augustinian and Calvinist doctrines of the sovereignty of God, the irresistibility of grace, revelation as divine intervention into history, and the shadow of a final, irreversible divine judgment that seem to create special difficulties for process theologians."⁴⁹³ These themes are indeed some of the remaining dissonances between Reformed and process theologies. The majority of this project has been devoted to the areas where process and Reformed theologies have significant points of

⁴⁹³ Donald G. Bloesch, "Process Theology and Reformed Theology," in McKim, *Major Themes*, 386.

agreement and similarity, but as Bloesch shows, there are still some areas of irreconcilable difference that must be taken into account. Throughout this chapter, Bloesch will be referenced in order to illustrate the sharp distinction that can be seen between process thinkers and Reformed theologians, particularly when their differences are so heavily emphasized over their commonalities as seen in this work of Bloesch's. The fact that these differences remain does not invalidate the rest of the dialogue, however, as it merely indicates that the two traditions are not identical and potentially have much to learn from one another. The three most important remaining areas of difference between the two traditions that will be addressed are: (1) the way in which God is unique or superior to the world, (2) the direction of theological work, either from experience up or from God down, and (3) the form of God's power, and thus where hope can be found in the theologies. Each of these dissonances will be explored briefly. In the analysis of these dissonances, previously examined points of agreement, similarity, and difference will be seen, as will one new similarity and two new differences.

The first area of dissonance is found in the ways in which process thought and the Reformed tradition differently understand God's uniqueness, distinction, and otherness when compared to the world. Bloesch addresses the two theologies' different approaches to God by claiming that "process thinkers like to state the issue this way: we much choose between the unchanging and passionless absolute of classical tradition and the creative surge or creative emergence of modern evolutionary thought."⁴⁹⁴ While he may be simplifying the issue, Bloesch is getting at the heart of their different conceptualizations of God: for the Reformed tradition God is capable of existence apart from the world and is influenced by the world only to the extent that God chooses, while for process thought God is continually growing and being influenced by the world. From a Reformed perspective, God is uniquely Other because God is

⁴⁹⁴ Bloesch, 390.

the self-sufficient sovereign who guides the world through the divine decision of election, which in Christ determines who God is and who the world will be. In all of reality, God is the only entity that exists by its own volition. All others exist, at least in part, because God has so chosen. But from a process perspective, God is distinct from the world not because God could exist apart from the world and chooses the events of the world, but because God has an entirely unique structure of concrescence, in which God everlastingly concresces in a reversal of poles and inversion of processes, and in which God is the only concrescence providing its own initial aim. The difference between the two seems clear: either God is the absolute sovereign who chooses to guide the world, or God is an integral and unique part of the God-world relationship that advances creativity together as a single whole.

Although it is true that process theology and Reformed thought disagree on how God is metaphysically distinct from the world, they do both agree on the fact of God's uniqueness. For both, there are significant ways in which God is different in kind from the rest of reality. This is important to keep in mind: that despite their difference in this regard, it is a difference within a wider similarity of God's uniqueness. Ultimately, this dissonance primarily comes down to a difference between God's limits being self-imposed by God's choice and God's limits being imposed by metaphysical necessities. In both cases, the term "limit" is being used despite the fact that both would claim "limit" may not be the appropriate term, since for both the God that exists is the perfect God, and thus any way in which God is "limited" is not truly a limit. Both traditions deal with God as God has become known to humanity, but they disagree with why God is this way. For Reformed theology, it is because God has chosen to be God-for-us rather than an isolated God, while for process theology it is because God could not exist without the world. This difference does matter, but it is a difference that is partially grounded in speculation,

since in both cases it is looking beyond the God that greets us in order to try to explain why God is God. Regardless of whether or not God has chosen to set aside some of God's isolated sovereignty as the Reformed tradition claims, both theologies agree on God's uniqueness in the God-world relationship, and that God alone provides the ground for God's own being (or the initial aim for God's concrescence, to use process language).

There can be found a dogmatic point of agreement, a similarity, and a difference within this dissonance, each of which has already previously been explored. They agree that God is unique through God's ontological distinction from the rest of reality. They are similar in their stance that God, as seen in Christ, is kenotically "limited," although they differ in whether this is a necessary or voluntary limitation. And they disagree on whether or not God's sovereignty is a lack in which God is incomplete without the world or if it is God's complete isolated perfection. This dissonance does not go away, since it contains within it a point of real difference. But it is a topic that can largely be bracketed aside as speculation primarily concerned with doctrines in which both traditions are in general agreement, with the differences not having a direct bearing on God's relationship to the world as it actually exists.

The second area of dissonance is the primary source and direction of the two theologies. Reformed theology starts with the revelation of Christ and moves down from God to humanity, while process thought generally starts with experience and works up toward God. The goal of process thought is to have a metaphysical system that is capable of accounting for any experience whatsoever. Because of this, process thought will always give experience the greatest weight and authority, using experience as the "foundation" of the rest of the system. But for Reformed theology, God's revelation, especially as it is seen in Christ and witnessed in scripture, is the sole source of truth. Bloesch addresses this dissonance by writing that "Reformed theology

confesses that God as revealed in Jesus Christ and attested in the Bible has final and unconditional authority for faith and life. Process theology affirms that our authority lies in what can be felt and perceived empirically and what can be tested scientifically.”⁴⁹⁵ He is arguing that process thought and the Reformed tradition start from two different points and move in opposite directions when making their arguments. From the standpoint of Reformed theology, particularly Barth, process thought represents a natural theology, and as such is an enemy of true theology, moving in the opposite direction from how theology should operate. And from the standpoint of process thought, Reformed theology operating purely out of revelation is making claims that have very little, if any, basis for truth and accuracy.

This dissonance is not nearly as strong as it first appears to be. Yes, it is true that process thought begins with experience rather than the revelation of God, but just as with the Reformed tradition, there is an important difference that must be drawn between philosophy and theology. Although similarly named, process theology uses process philosophy as a tool for the interpretation of revelation. They are not identical, just very similarly named and often incorrectly used interchangeably. But the task of process theology is the same as the task of Reformed theology: the interpretation of revelation, which inherently uses a philosophy. The philosophy traditionally used by Reformed theologians, substance metaphysics, is not grounded in the revelation of God. The Reformed tradition merely wishes to hold process theology to a higher standard than that to which it holds itself by judging a theology based entirely on the philosophy that it uses to interpret revelation. Once this hypocrisy is put aside, it can be seen that Reformed theology and process theology are in agreement regarding their tasks, although it must still be admitted that the philosophy traditionally used by the Reformed tradition strongly disagrees with process thought, on a great variety of aspects.

⁴⁹⁵ Bloesch, 396.

This, then, is another area of formal similarity to be found in the two traditions. Both of them agree that the core task of theology is to interpret the revelation of God, but they disagree over the lens used to do so. For process theology, process philosophy serves as the interpretive framework of revelation, whereas for Reformed theologians it has normally been substance metaphysics. Thus, both traditions agree on the task and methodology of theology, but differ in the primary tool used to accomplish the task. And although they see their tasks as similar, because this is not an area of agreement it means that their philosophical lenses are not interchangeable. Even though process philosophy provides an incredibly useful tool for Reformed theologians, it cannot be adopted in its entirety while still being faithful to the Reformed tradition (at least not as they currently exist).

The final remaining area of major dissonance between process thought and the Reformed tradition in the process-Reformed cycle of soteriology has to do with God's power and connected eschatological hope. The Reformed tradition has been consistent in advocating that God is in control of the world, and in the end will bring about God's eschaton. This allows for believers to have eschatological hope that all will be made right in the end by God. Process thought has been far less certain that God's eschaton will occur, since the ongoing advance of reality relies on the world as much as it relies on God. For the process theologian, eschatological hope is not to be found in some final event at the end of time, but in the end of every actual occasion as it is resurrected into God's consequent nature. Bloesch briefly alludes to this difference in one of the main conflicts he sees between the two traditions: "whereas Reformed theology avers that humanity's chief concern should be to glorify God and enjoy God forever (Westminster Shorter Catechism), process theology places the accent on human beings sharing the glory of God in the

creative advance into novelty.”⁴⁹⁶ In highlighting the differing concerns of human endeavor, Bloesch is also implying where God is at work, since it is where human effort is not needed. For the Reformed tradition, humanity can glorify and enjoy God because of its confidence that God is in control and will make all things right, while for process thought human effort is needed alongside God because God guides the world rather than controlling it. The difference here is that on the one hand God is ultimately in control of the world and is able to guide it to a specific end where all will be as God wills it, while on the other hand God accompanies the world, transforming and preserving every moment within the enjoyment of the divine self.

The most significant amelioration of this dissonance is through the Reformed tradition’s necessary abandonment of substance metaphysics. As previously seen, when theology is allowed to take the lead over philosophy, and when the Reformed tradition follows its own Christocentric focus, the power of Christ revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is not a power that controls and determines, but one that loves and suffers alongside humanity. If this Reformed reconsideration of divine power is followed through, then it can agree with process thought that God accompanies and guides the world rather than determining the world. But both can also agree to an extent that God is in control, given the fact that even in process thought God presents possibilities and lures the world towards some futures and away from others. It must be recognized, however, that this kind of control is not a determinative control but more like the control of a parent raising children, where a parent is said to be in control but where the children still have free autonomy to make their own choices in response to their parent. Although God can thus be said to be in control as God accompanies and guides the world for both traditions, the related difference in eschatological hope is left unaddressed. And here difference will remain.

This remaining dissonance takes into account two points of doctrinal similarity already

⁴⁹⁶ Bloesch, 394.

discussed: (1) God's power as seen through the kenotic Christ and (2) God's providential guidance of the world. But it importantly highlights a point of irreconcilable difference: eschatology. Process thought sees eschatology as occurring within every moment as each occasion is resurrected into the consequent nature of God. But for the Reformed tradition, eschatology primarily occurs in a final end-time event brought about by God, even if there is still a realized ongoing eschatology as well. With the Reformed tradition's greater emphasis on God being in control (even if it is a guiding control), there will still be the expectation that eventually God will be able to guide the world to God's eschatological ends. In the meantime, Reformed theology would still celebrate a realized ongoing eschatology similar to that found in process thought. But unlike the Reformed tradition, process theology neither relies on, nor is confident of, an eschatological event at the end of time.

These three areas, God's unique sovereignty, the philosophical sources, and God's power in bringing about eschatological hope, are three areas in which process thought and the Reformed tradition significant trouble in finding agreement. Even when the Reformed tradition moves beyond the substance metaphysics that has held back its theology for far too long, or takes its Christological commitment seriously, these dissonances are lessened but do not disappear. God's unique sovereignty in the God-world relationship is a point of agreement, but there is still disagreement on why God is the way God is, whether through metaphysical necessity or through God's choice. Although the Reformed tradition portrays itself as moving in an opposite direction than process thought, both theologies use a philosophy to interpret revelation. And even though there are areas of significant difference where process philosophy and Reformed theology disagree and keep Reformed theologians from adopting process philosophy in its entirety (at least as they currently exist), there is nothing in principle preventing Reformed theology from

being at least guided by process philosophy as it interprets revelation instead of using its traditional interpretive lens of substance metaphysics. And both theologies can conceive of God as being in control of the world through God's accompanying and guiding of the world, but the Reformed tradition still wants to make room for the possibility of an eschatological event at the end of time, while process thought strives to keep it open ended.

It is good that there are remaining areas of dissonance like this where process thought and the Reformed tradition cannot be forced together. Here, the process or Reformed theologian can look at the insights of the other tradition in order to see and value the other's experience of reality, even if the conclusion cannot fit into one's own worldview. We can only learn from people who are different from us, even if all we learn is that the other experiences the world and God in a different way. Some theologies and philosophies are definitely more appropriate, adequate, and life-giving than others, but at some point the differences between them only reflect the different ways in which reality is experienced by different people. Such is the case with the remaining dissonances between pure process theology and Reformed theology as guided by process thought, a process-Reformed theology.

But these remaining dissonances between process and Reformed theologies should not be easily glossed over. The differences matter. From a Reformed perspective, the freedom of God is of paramount importance. It is easy to claim that the difference between explaining God's "limitation" through metaphysical necessity or through choice is a matter of speculation that does not matter as much as other things the traditions hold in common, but many Reformed theologians rightly hold fast to their conviction that God has freely chosen to be God-for-us. Not only this, but also in God's providential guidance of the world, God needs to be absolutely free for Reformed theologians, so that God can act however God wills. Of course, a process

theologian would be quick to claim that God is still as free as any entity can be while existing alongside other free entities. Given the absolute freedom of God at the heart of the Reformed tradition, rightfully arrived at through a Reformed reading of scripture, these dissonances will have to remain as process and Reformed theologians continue to witness to reality as they see it.

Despite only being left with these dissonances after a process-Reformed cycle of soteriology has been seen and developed, there are still several objections that could be raised, both against the conclusion and against the project as a whole. Although there are several objections that process theologians could raise, there are three that will receive attention here. The first is that there is not enough mutuality between God and the world in the resulting conclusion, with God's election still driving almost everything. The second objection is that the process-Reformed cycle of soteriology is in many ways a return to classical theism, dismissing process thought. And the third objection is that the resulting theology is too overtly Christian in its orientation. Each of these objections, along with a response, will now be addressed in turn.

As was seen in the earlier exploration of process thought, reciprocity between God and the world is an important element of the system. With Alfred North Whitehead, process theologians claim that "it is as true to say that God creates the World, as that the World creates God," among other similar statements.⁴⁹⁷ Although not in an identical relationship with one another, God and the world are undeniably in a mutually reciprocal interdependent relationship for process thought. And although this is reflected by the process-Reformed cycle of soteriology's opening point that God does not exist without the world, the rest of the statement does seem to give God far more power than the world in the ongoing relationship. God exercises agency in moving into the world and in bringing the world into God, both through the doctrine of election as understood by the consequent nature. Meanwhile, the world is only left to enact God

⁴⁹⁷ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 348.

within the world. Clearly, a process-Reformed cycle of soteriology favors the Reformed side in emphasizing God's role over the world, at least from the perspective of a process theologian.

This objection comes from a fundamental misunderstanding of the cycle of soteriology, and to some degree from a misrepresentation of process thought itself. In process theology, God and the world are in an asymmetrical reciprocal relationship. Yes, it is true that God and the world create one another, but they create each other in different ways. The same is the case here, where God and the world elect one another in different ways. By choosing to enact God in the world, the world is electing God as God, choosing to have God be God of the world and following the guidance of God. Thus, in imitation of Whitehead, it is as true to say that God elects the World, as that the World elects God. God and the world both choose one another, and choose to be for the other in a relationship with the other. Thus, the world elects God even as God elects the world. This objection highlights the difference seen within a previously explored point of doctrinal similarity: the world's influence on God. Both traditions have agreed on the proposition that God is influenced by the world, but they disagree on the language used to express whether this influence is a metaphysical necessity or a voluntary choice of God's. The mutuality seen in both traditions and emphasized by process theology is still held onto in the process-Reformed cycle of soteriology, even in the doctrine of election, which appears to be the most theocentric aspect of the God-world relationship.

On the surface, and without further explanation, a process-Reformed cycle of soteriology does appear to be a return to the classical theism that process thought opposes. It uses language such as omnipotence, providence, and election. All three of these terms come with a great deal of theological and philosophical baggage, specifically a conception of God from substance metaphysics that is strongly opposed by process theology. Even just by using the loaded

language of omnipotence, providence, election, etc., there is a danger that the errors of classical theism will find their way into the dialogue and the resulting theology. Process theologians should rightly object if classical theism based on substance metaphysics enters into the picture, and thus should be on guard against its creeping in through this language.

This objection is one that should always be kept in mind by the process-Reformed theologian. The classical theism of substance metaphysics should rightly be left behind. But the collaboration of process and Reformed thought is a modification of classical theology, not a replacement of it. The terms of classical theism are still appropriate for usage, but they must be understood as being interpreted by process philosophy rather than by substance metaphysics. The resulting doctrines of omnipotence, providence, and election still maintain the core of their theological ideas, but have been made more adequate through the use of process philosophy to explain them. What these terms once represented in classical theism is no longer theologically appropriate (if it ever was), but that does not mean that the terms themselves should be abandoned. Just like other terms from classical theology, such as God, salvation, creation, incarnation, and resurrection, the problematic terms to which process thought would object can be preserved and transformed by new perspectives.

The final major potential objection from a process audience is that the resulting process-Reformed cycle of soteriology is too explicitly Christian, with no real room for other religious traditions. The focus is entirely on the Christian God, specifically emphasizing the role of Christ and using traditional Christian theological language. There certainly appears to be little, if any, room left for the insights of non-Christian religious traditions. The Reformed tradition has been very ecumenical when it comes to seeing and appreciating the insights of other Christian traditions, but has not been at the forefront of interreligious dialogue. A process-Reformed

collaboration reflects this deficiency of the Reformed tradition, and thus is something that should be opposed by process theologians.

It is true that the Reformed tradition has been lacking when it comes to positive interreligious dialogue. This objection reflects a final area of true difference between the two traditions. For Reformed theology, despite its openness to ecumenical dialogue, Christ's revelation and salvation is often found only within Christianity. Or for some Reformed theologians, there is an inclusiveness that Christ can be found in other traditions as well. But even when that is the case, it is Christ that is found in the other, not their own religious truths. Process thought, on the other hand, is much more open to seeing the truths of a variety of traditions and holding them all together as true and mutually transformative in a kind of deep pluralism encouraged by John Cobb. These are two very different philosophical approaches to interreligious dialogue.

This difference is precisely the reason why process thinkers should actually encourage a process-Reformed collaboration. Rather than denounce the limitation to interreligious dialogue imposed by the Reformed tradition on process thought, it would be better to praise the greater interreligious possibilities being offered to the Reformed tradition through process thought. And it is true that the process-Reformed cycle of soteriology is explicitly Christian, but given that one of the dialogue partners is a Christian theological tradition it should be expected that the resulting collaboration is heavily influenced by Christianity. However, by using process philosophy as the guiding philosophy for Reformed theology, a new space is opened for interreligious dialogue. The Reformed tradition has always endeavored to speak for all of Christianity, not just a narrow tradition. Process thought seeks to account for all of experienced reality, including all religions. Both traditions are thus committed to speaking beyond

themselves, but by using process philosophy the Reformed tradition can further stretch its commitment, enabling Reformed theologians to take seriously the insights of other religious traditions. Instead of representing a threat to interreligious dialogue, a process-Reformed collaboration could bring more theologians into the discussion.

From the perspective of process theologians, the process-Reformed cycle of soteriology may be too theocentric, too much of a return to classical theism, and too exclusively Christian. Each of these objections raises an important issue that must be kept in mind to guard against the errors of substance-driven classical theology within Reformed thought. But each of these objections has been answered, and disappears when the process-Reformed cycle of soteriology is rightly understood. It may appear to be theocentric, but it is just as mutually immanent as process thought, with the world electing God even as God elects the world. The language being used is the language of classical theism, but the terms have been modified and must be understood in new ways. And through process thought the Reformed tradition is opened to greater possibilities of interreligious dialogue. The major objections from process thought have been answered, and the interests of process theologians are served by continuing a dialogue with the Reformed tradition.

The Reformed audience has a different set of objections to the project. As with process thinkers, there are many objections that could be raised, but only three major ones will be addressed here. The objections that need to be dealt with are: (1) creation is being given too much power over God, (2) God is not in control, and (3) process thought represents a form of natural theology, which is strongly opposed by elements of the Reformed tradition. Although these have been touched on earlier, particularly in the remaining dissonances between process

and Reformed theologies, they are worth addressing again briefly as the primary objections that Reformed theologians will have.

Many Reformed theologians would object that in a process-Reformed cycle of soteriology the world is given too much power over God. By portraying the unity of God and the world as occurring through election into the consequent nature, the process understanding of the world as profoundly influencing God, even creating God, is brought into Reformed theology. In process thought, influence is power, and thus the world is having power over God as a result of being elected into God. But from a traditional Reformed perspective, God can never be subject to the power of the world, since God is the source of the world's power. As a result of dialogue with process thought, the world appears to be given more power over God than would traditionally be acceptable to a Reformed theologian.

It is true that God is influenced by the world in a process-Reformed cycle of soteriology, and in that sense the world has power over God. But it is not power to the extent of control or determination, which is what truly worries Reformed theologians. Even without process thought, Reformed theology can arrive at the conclusion that the world influences God, as can be seen in the doctrinal similarity analyzed above that both agree on the proposition that God is influenced by the world even if they disagree on why. God has chosen to be God-for-us, and in doing so, God has chosen to love and care for the world. If God truly loves the world, then God is influenced by what occurs in the world. Thus, the occasions of the world have an influence on God, which is the only conceivable form of power in a process worldview.

And even though the world has an influence on God, there are two caveats that must be identified that serve to alleviate the Reformed objection. First, the world is brought into God through God's election of the world, meaning that God is still the agent of the action, even if the

result is God's being influenced by the world. Second, it is not the world itself that is united with God in the consequent nature, but the world as it has been transformed by God. It is not the pure events of the world that influence God, but the world as it is received and transformed by God that influences God, meaning that not only is it God's agency that brings the world into unity with the divine self, but also that it is only through the lens of God's transformative reception of the world that the world is able to influence God. The world does have power over God, the power of influence that God has chosen to give it in choosing to be God-for-us and in bringing the world into transformed unity with the divine self. Reformed theology would not object to this, which is the true understanding of the world's power to which it at first objects.

The second potential objection from Reformed theologians is that God no longer is in control of reality. God is seen as moving alongside the world instead of directing the world. And the world, by enacting God or not, has a level of freedom that implies God is not in control of the world since God cannot determine the course of the world's events. God not being in control of the world directly contradicts the doctrine of providence as it is traditionally understood by Reformed theologians.

Despite giving God all power and appearing to deny the freedom of creation, traditional Reformed theology has normally endorsed some form of compatibilism. In compatibilism, the world freely enacts God's will. In a theology guided by substance metaphysics, compatibilism is the idea that there are two wills (God's and the worldly agent's) in every action, with one will (God's) determining the action even as the lesser will freely chooses the same action. There are a multitude of problems with compatibilism in substance metaphysics, but process thought offers the Reformed tradition a way to revise compatibilism so that it actually makes sense. In process thought, God's will is presented in the initial aim to which each occasion is lured, but that

occasion can choose not to enact God's will. When the initial aim is followed, then God's will is freely enacted by the decision of the concreting occasion, meaning that both wills have cooperated to create a new reality. And even when the initial aim is rejected, by the rejection of that possibility both wills are involved in the concreting decision. By understanding the initial aim as a revised version of compatibilism, it is plain that the process-Reformed understanding of God still fulfills all the traditional roles of divine providence: accompanying the world, guiding the world in accordance with God's will, and preserving and upholding the world as it advances into the future. In this objection we see again the disagreements within a doctrinal point of similarity emphasized over their commonality. In this case, it is divine providence. This objection emphasizes the fact that process and Reformed theologians disagree on the language used to describe how God guides the world, without recognizing the greater underlying agreement on the core proposition that God does in fact guide, accompany, and provide for the world in every moment.

The final major Reformed objection to the project, that process thought is a form of natural theology, has largely been addressed above as the second remaining dissonance between Reformed theology and process thought. But as this is a special concern for the Reformed tradition, particularly for those influenced by Barth, it must be addressed again. Barth considers natural theology to be any theology that is guided by something other than the revelation of God in Christ as it is witnessed in scripture. Although he acknowledges that any theology makes use of philosophy, he is particularly opposed to philosophy masquerading as theology. For him, and also for much of the Reformed tradition, all theology must be grounded in Christ alone. But Christian process theology appears to be a Christianized process philosophy, grounded on experience rather than on Christ.

As seen above, the misconception that causes this objection is identification of process theology and process philosophy as the same endeavor, both of which fall under the umbrella of process thought. Rather than being a true difference, this objection is focusing on the areas of difference seen within the methodological point of similarity explored above. Process philosophy is indeed the attempt to construct a metaphysical system that accounts for everything experienced in the world. But process theology is the explanation and explication of the revelation of scripture through the use of process philosophy. Given that traditional Reformed theology has used substance metaphysics to interpret revelation, it can hardly fault process theology for using process philosophy, even if the two philosophical frameworks are very different from one another. In fact, if the objection is that the philosophical framework being used influences the resulting theology too much rather than letting the theology take the lead, then traditional Reformed theology may be more at fault than process theology. In many areas, the revelation of God in Christ has been warped and twisted by substance metaphysics in traditional Reformed theology, such as in the doctrines of omnipotence and sovereignty. In these cases, a truly Reformed theology would closely resemble process theology and can certainly be guided by process philosophy as a framework, even if it currently cannot fully adopt process philosophy as its lens since it does not fully agree with the entirety of process thought.

The three major potential objections from a Reformed audience have found their answers. The world does not actually have too much power over God for Reformed theology, since it is the power of influence that God has chosen for the world to have in the transformative resurrection within the divine self. God still providentially upholds and guides the world according to God's will, with a revised form of compatibilism achieved through process thought. And rather than being a form of natural theology, a process-Reformed cycle of soteriology is

guided by process philosophy as a means of interpreting the revelation of God. Having dealt with the potential objections of Reformed theologians, it can be seen that it is possible for Reformed theologians to be in agreement with the process-Reformed collaboration of this project and see the value in further dialogue with process thought.

Throughout this chapter and the previous one, several doctrinal points of agreement, similarity, and difference were highlighted. It is important to gather these points together so that they can be seen in their entirety. There have been three points of doctrinal agreement, six of similarity, and three of true difference. The three points of agreement are God's uniqueness, Christ, and salvation. Both traditions agree that God is unique through being ontologically distinct from the rest of reality. Although they may express this distinction using different words since they are using different philosophical frameworks, they are in fact both in complete agreement on this point. Process and Reformed theologians are also in agreement that Christ reveals God, reconciles the world to God, is free to be present anywhere, and is seen as specially embodied in Jesus of Nazareth. They may differently emphasize which aspect of Christ is more important, Christ's presence everywhere or specifically in Jesus, but they agree on Christ's presence in both. And process thought and Reformed theology are in agreement that salvation is found through transformative unity with God's nature. For both, God resurrects the world by making it Godlike and uniting it to God's very self. These three doctrines are areas of profound agreement, moving beyond mere similarity.

There are six points of similarity that have been explored. In each of these, there is a core theological proposition on which both process and Reformed theologians agree, although they articulate that proposition in different ways. These areas of similarity are: divine providence, election, depravity, the influence of the world on God, divine power seen in Christ, and

theological methodology. Both traditions agree that God guides, accompanies, and provides for the world, but they disagree on whether God's guidance is best understood through influence or through control. Process and Reformed theologians agree that God resurrects a transformed world into unity with God's self, at the same time also determining who God is and what the world can be by giving the gift of God and the world to the world, but they disagree on if this occurs because it is a metaphysically necessary part of the ongoing process of reality or if it is the eternal free decision of God. They agree that there is a fundamental lack in the world that causes the world to be reliant on God, but they disagree on how best to articulate this lack: either as static repetition of the past or as bondage to sin. Theologians from both traditions agree that God is influenced by the world, but they disagree on whether this is because it is a metaphysical necessity originating in the fundamental relationality of reality or if it is because God has chosen to be God-for-us. They both see Christ as the epistemological key to understanding who God is and how God's power operates in the world, but they disagree if the kenotic Christ is a necessary consequence of the existence of other free beings or if it too is a consequence of God's choice to be God-for-us. And they agree that the task of theology is to interpret the revelation of God, but they disagree in the philosophical lens that is most appropriate for use in understanding that revelation. Although each of these points of similarity has aspects of disagreement within them, at their heart they each agree on a major theological proposition, and thus they kept from being points of real difference.

There have been found to be three points of true irreconcilable difference between process thought and the Reformed tradition, at least as both currently exist. The three differences found here are on God's sovereignty, eschatology, and interreligious approaches. Despite both theologies having moments wherein God is sovereign, they fundamentally disagree on what

divine sovereignty actually means. Both claim that it represents God without the world (a state that never actually exists), but for process thought God can never actually be divorced from the world, whereas for the Reformed tradition God would be no less God without the world. Process theologians see God's sovereignty as a lack of actuality, with God needing the world to actualize the God's infinite potentiality. Reformed theologians, on the other hand, claim God is self-sufficient within God's self and needs no world to be complete. In eschatology, process theologians see God's eschatological action in the transformation of each moment as it resurrected into the consequent nature, an ongoing eschatology, while Reformed theologians hold out hope for a final end-time event brought about by God, an event that is in theory impossible in process thought since it requires God's unilateral controlling power. Both traditions do have a concept of ongoing realized eschatology, and it could be possible (although highly unlikely) for God to eventually influence the world into the desired end-time state in process thought, but Reformed theology's emphasis on God's final end-time action is ultimately incompatible with process philosophy. And although there may be individual Reformed theologians who move towards pluralism in approaching interreligious dialogue, generally the most open to other religions that is possible for Reformed theology is a form of inclusivism, wherein Christ can be found in other religions too. But this is not enough for process thought, since it denies the truth and authenticity of the experiences of other religions, instead reinterpreting them through a Christian lens. These differences are important to keep in mind even as the dialogue emphasizes the similarities and agreements that have been found.

Although the major objections of process and Reformed theologians are overcome, this does not mean that they completely agree, as can be seen from the remaining dissonances that are lessened but held as real differences between the two traditions. In approaching one another

in dialogue and attempting to achieve syntheses, the process and Reformed traditions can mutually benefit from one another. Granted, the Reformed tradition may have more to gain by being rescued from substance metaphysics as an interpretive lens, but both sides do benefit. Each of the traditions emphasizes different theological concepts, as can be seen from their remaining areas of difference, and these differing emphases can serve as future areas of learning and growth. Process thought and the Reformed tradition have several points of agreement and similarity, as can be seen in the process-Reformed cycle of soteriology formed out of the dialogue between them. But this is only one small step of the larger dialogue between them.

Conclusion

This project set out to establish that by bringing the process thought exemplified by Alfred North Whitehead into dialogue with Reformed theology as seen in Karl Barth and Shirley Guthrie, the problematic Reformed soteriological concepts of divine sovereignty, total depravity, divine providence, and election can be understood in more adequate terms for the world in which we live through the lens of process thought's conceptions of novelty and divine natures, while also providing process thought with points of commonality and with unique emphases through dialogue with the Reformed tradition since they are both reflecting the same soteriological cycle of movements in the God-world relationship. This has been achieved through careful exploration of process thought and the Reformed tradition, before bringing them together into dialogue with one another, resulting in a process-Reformed understanding of the cycle of soteriology. The previous chapters have accomplished this task.

In Chapter One, the relevant concepts of process thought were examined. The writings of many process thinkers, especially Whitehead, were considered. The primordial nature of God was seen to be the realm of possibility. The lure toward novelty was the initial aim bringing about novelty through the primordial nature providing the best possibilities for each occasion. Novelty was explored as the incarnation of creativity, the radically new as it emerges. God's consequent nature was understood as the transformative reception of the world as it is felt by God, saving the world and allowing God to present the best possible initial aims. Process Christology saw Christ as the revelation of God, representing God's love in the world through the incarnation of creative transformation. These terms as they were defined were later used in Chapter Three to bring process thought into dialogue with the Reformed tradition. Overall, it was

seen in Chapter One that God's salvific actions towards the world, and the world's salvific actions towards God, are an interrelated and ongoing cycle, even though God has a unique place within that cycle.

In Chapter Two, the focus shifted to Reformed theology. Although many Reformed theologians were explored, the focus was primarily on Barth and Guthrie. As with the previous chapter, the relevant Reformed doctrines were examined. Divine sovereignty was seen as the self-sufficient freedom of God to be for humanity. Total depravity was understood as original sin's corruption of the good of human nature. Divine providence was God's ongoing care for creation to control or guide all things. Christ was viewed as the unity of God and humanity, providing salvation through revelation and reconciliation. Election was centered on Christ, in whom God chooses who God and humanity will be.

Chapter Two found a core theological insight within each of these Reformed doctrines, which can be removed from any philosophical lens in order to express a fundamental aspect of God and God's relationship to the world. For divine sovereignty it is the reliability and constancy of God in being who God has chosen to be. Total depravity reflects humanity's inability to rescue itself. Divine providence shows that God is continually at work in loving and providing for the world. The doctrine of Christ illustrates that Jesus Christ is the God-man who reveals God and reconciles creation to God. And election represents God's decision of who God will be and of who humanity can be. These insights of the Reformed tradition were later brought into dialogue with process thought in Chapter Three. Throughout Chapter Two, it was seen that the Reformed tradition has generally given all agency to God as God elects to be God for us, using divine sovereign providence to control the world's existence and destiny.

Chapter Three brought together process thought and the Reformed tradition. It explored the movements of God and the world in both systems. The movements of God in process thought are God's incarnate presence in the world in order to share with each occasion the initial aim, influencing and guiding each moment towards its best possibilities, and in the Reformed tradition God's movements are seen through God's presence and works in the world in establishing a salvific covenantal relationship with creation. The world's movements in process thought are the transformation and resurrection within God of the fullness of the world in its response to God, while in the Reformed tradition the world's movements are the world's joining to Christ and thus receiving sanctified freedom to obey God.

Following these broad movements, Chapter Three then provides an analysis of the major stages or movements of the cycle of soteriology as seen in both process thought and the Reformed tradition. While not in complete agreement, a statement of process-Reformed theology was achieved as the culmination of their dialogue, in which it was claimed that both traditions are in agreement that God does not exist apart from the world, with both God and the world in static absolute states, but rather God moves into the world through God's omnipotent loving providential lure, resulting in the possibility of the world's enactment of God through the appearance of Christ's creative transformation, culminating in God resurrecting the world into everlasting unity within God's self by election into the consequent nature, which simultaneously is also God's movement into the world.

The potential objections and remaining dissonances were addressed in Chapter Four. First, the areas of disagreement between process thought and the Reformed tradition that remain after the dialogue were highlighted, specifically the differing levels of sovereign uniqueness for God, the primary sources used, and the form God's eschatological power takes. Rather than

being resolved, these differences were held as witnessing to different ways in which people experience reality, and as such as potential avenues of growth and learning in the future. Three major potential objections were considered, both from process thought (a lack of mutuality, a return to classical theism, and too exclusively Christian) and from the Reformed tradition (creation has too much power over God, God is not in control, and process theology is a form of natural theology). Each of these objections was answered in turn, either eliminating the criticism or significantly alleviating the underlying problem. Having addressed the major objections of process and Reformed theologians, it was possible to bring both traditions fully into the dialogue as participants in forming a process-Reformed collaboration. In dealing with these dissonances and objections, it became clear that although the major objections of process and Reformed theologians are overcome, this does not mean that they completely agree, as can be seen from the remaining dissonances, which are lessened but held as real differences between the two traditions.

Over the course of these four chapters, the thesis that bringing together process thought and the Reformed tradition will result in a mutually beneficial dialogue has been proven. The relevant soteriological doctrines and concepts of process and Reformed theologies were examined. Then both traditions' understandings of God's and the world's movements in the cycle of soteriology were brought together into dialogue, resulting in a process-Reformed collaboration. Possible objections to the project were considered from both sides, and ultimately all were answered.

Throughout the dialogue between process and Reformed theologies, it was made plain that there are significant points of agreement, similarity, and difference to be found between the two traditions. The major theological elements explored here exhibited three doctrines that agree,

six that are similar, and three that are truly different. They have been found to be in agreement on the uniqueness of God, the person and work of Christ, and what salvation entails. For both, God is unique through an ontological distinction from the rest of reality. Christ reveals God and provides salvation to humanity for both theologies, and can be found anywhere but is seen especially in Jesus of Nazareth. And they both envision salvation as representing transformation and unity with God.

Process thought and the Reformed tradition have been shown to have significant similarity in their doctrines of providence, election, depravity, mutuality, divine power, and in their methodologies. They agree that divine providence is God's guiding and accompanying of the world, but for process thought this is done through God's influence and being influenced, while for the Reformed tradition it is through God's control of the world. For both traditions God presents the gift of God and the world to the world, but they differ in that process thought sees this as a metaphysical necessity of the ongoing advance of creativity, while Reformed theology sees it as God's eternal decree of election. The two theologies both express the core idea that we are reliant on God for our salvation and continued existence, although process thought emphasizes our lack and original sin as static repetition of the past and self-regard, while the Reformed tradition understands it as the total depravity of humanity's bondage to sin. They both contain the concept of the mutuality of God and the world, since for both God is influenced by the world even as God influences the world, yet in process theology this is a metaphysical necessity while in the Reformed tradition it is God's voluntary choice to be God-for-us that allows God to be influenced. There is a kenotic view of Christ as being the key to revealing God and how God's power operates in the world in both traditions, but for process thought it is a metaphysically necessary kenosis, while Reformed theology sees it as a voluntary kenosis.

Lastly, process and Reformed theologies both have the same core methodology of seeking to interpret the revelation of God, particularly as it is seen in scripture, but they differ in the philosophy that is used for that interpretation: process philosophy on the one hand and substance metaphysics on the other.

Of the various topics explored in this work, the three areas of irreconcilable difference that have been seen are God's sovereignty, eschatology, and interreligious dialogue. Regarding the sovereignty of God, process thought claims that there is never anything that can be independent of the world, seeing God's sovereignty as a lack that requires the world's actualization of the primordial nature's potentiality. But the Reformed tradition sees God as in principle able to be divorced from the world completely, a separate and perfect entity in God's own self. Eschatology finds very different representations in process and Reformed theologies, with process thought understanding eschatology in God's ongoing constant judgment of every moment, while the Reformed tradition emphasizes an end-time event of God's judgment and transformation of the world in addition to an ongoing eschatology. And in their interreligious approaches, process theology encourages a deep pluralism wherein all traditions can be held as true, while Reformed theologians advocate for a form of inclusivism, if even that. Although these are real differences that must always be kept in mind, the numerous agreements and similarities make a process-Reformed dialogue possible and beneficial. Before concluding, it is important to illustrate how the dialogue that has explored these agreements, similarities, and differences has been beneficial for both sides.

There are many benefits to this dialogue, both for the Reformed tradition and for process thought. As with any two participants in a meaningful dialogue, neither of them leaves the dialogue as they entered it. Both have been transformed in some way, with both benefitting from

the dialogue. The Reformed tradition is left with a more positive conceptualization of the God-world relationship, with a postmodern theology, and with greater resources for interreligious dialogue. Process thought also makes gains from this dialogue with the Reformed tradition: access to broader terminology, language for emphasizing aspects of the system that have traditionally been neglected, and the incorporation of the theology of the Reformed tradition as a resource. Each of these benefits deserves some exploration.

The first, and most obvious, benefit for the Reformed tradition is that the God-world relationship resulting from a process-Reformed theology is a much more adequate understanding than the one that the Reformed tradition first brought to the dialogue. When the Reformed tradition entered this dialogue, with substance metaphysics shaping its ideas of God and God's power in particular, it could almost be claimed that God was a puppetmaster and the world was only filled with puppets for God to use as God wished. The puppetmaster might like some of the puppets, or even all of them, but the puppets had no real effect on God. Now, guided by Reformed Christocentric theology and process philosophy, God can be seen as the poet of the world, guiding and accompanying the world. Not only is this new understanding of the God-world relationship more in line with scripture (the primary criterion for the Reformed tradition), but it is also more in line with how the world is actually experienced (the primary criterion for process philosophy).

Through dialogue with process thought and achievement a process-Reformed theology, the Reformed tradition also becomes a postmodern theology. Since postmodernism is a term that must be treated with care, it should be noted that it is being used here as constructive postmodernism specifically, since that is what process thought can be considered. By using process philosophy as its interpretive lens, the Reformed tradition can move beyond the

modernism (or even pre-modernism) where it has been stuck. Here, the Reformed tradition can embody its unofficial motto of *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda* by adapting the philosophy it uses to interpret theology to one that is far less flawed and takes into account the critiques of postmodernism. Process thought offers the Reformed tradition this exact philosophy. The result is a theology that has been made stronger by a more adequate and comprehensive interpretive lens.

An outgrowth of the other two benefits to the Reformed tradition is that it is provided with greater resources for doing interreligious work. Since substance metaphysics has been left behind, and the God-world relationship has been understood in a positive new light, Jesus of Nazareth need no longer be the exclusive point of contact between God and the world. In a process-Reformed theology, God is free to enter into the world wherever God wishes, and although Jesus Christ is definitive for Christians, there is nothing ruling out the presence of the divine in other traditions as genuine. This moves even beyond Barth's desire for no limitations on God's freedom or Guthrie's modified inclusivism. Rather, it opens the possibility to the fullness of other traditions being just as true as, or even more true than, Christianity (since all have both human and divine elements). With the door thus opened by process thought's highlighting of elements already present within Reformed theology, it is possible for the Reformed tradition to take a lead in interreligious dialogue, right alongside process theologians.

Turning now to the benefits for process thought, one of the main benefits is the ability to use broader theological terminology that sees wider usage. The result of process theology being able to reclaim terms like omnipotence, election, providence, sovereignty, and others is that it can speak to Christian theologians using their own terms rather than using a language that may appear to be too foreign to them. This is a mixed blessing, however, for two reasons. One

downside of using broader Christian terminology is that these terms come with meanings attached, and thus how they are used differently by process thought would still have to be explained to an audience. Secondly, the broader terminology is less precise than the terms of process thought and thus obscures some of the intricacies of the philosophy. Despite these downsides to process thought using broader terminology familiar to Christians, it is still an advantage to do so, at least in certain circumstances. Especially when first introducing Christians to process thought, or when trying to reform Christian theology from within the system, being able to use familiar language is of paramount importance.

The second major benefit of this dialogue for process thought is that particular emphases within the process tradition are highlighted by Reformed theology, emphases that are otherwise often neglected. Chief among these are the uniqueness and sovereignty of God, both of which are characteristic traits of the Reformed tradition. Mainstream process thought has heavily stressed the relational nature of God, in which God is in a mutual relationship with all the occasions of the world. Emphasizing God's relationality has been necessary as process thought distinguishes itself from substance-driven classical theism. But in doing so, it has often glossed over the ways in which God still maintains elements of uniqueness and sovereignty within the process system of thought. Through dialogue with the Reformed tradition, process theology can more emphatically remember that God is still God, and not just another part of the world process. God is unique in God's very constitution as an everlasting concrescence with a reversal of poles, and there are certainly elements of sovereignty in the divine natures, especially the primordial nature. This is not to say that God is divorced from the world or wholly separate, but it is a helpful reminder for process theologians that God is still Other in God's uniqueness and sovereignty.

A third benefit for process thought is broader than the other two benefits explored. It is that process thought is able to incorporate the Reformed tradition as a resource. At first this may seem to be nothing more than a restatement of what has already been covered by the first two benefits, but it represents something far greater. The Reformed tradition has often been seen as the primary proponent of classical theism and its substance metaphysics, thereby embodying the main opponent of process thought. By incorporating Reformed theology as a resource, process thought can show that even what appears to be among its most disagreeable opponents can in the end be accounted for and brought into general agreement with process theology. This represents a great achievement for process thought (and for the Reformed tradition) in which an “enemy” can be turned into a friend. And at the same time, by using the Reformed tradition as a resource, process thought can see that there are some classical religious notions that should not be discarded. This can primarily be seen through the unique emphases that are highlighted within process thought by dialogue with the Reformed tradition, but it is also reflected by the benefits of being able to use broader Christian terminology in some circumstances. This third benefit thus takes into account the previous two but also moves beyond them.

Overall, the dialogue resulting in a process-Reformed cycle of soteriology has been beneficial for both theological traditions. Reformed theologians are left with a postmodern theology that has a far more adequate God-world relationship reflecting the world in which we actually live, and are given better resources for meaningfully approaching interreligious dialogue. Process theologians, on the other hand, are able to incorporate elements of the Reformed tradition as theological resources, using classical theological terminology when appropriate and highlighting aspects of process thought reflecting classical religious concepts that should not be abandoned along with the rightful abandonment substance metaphysics. Both

theologies have certainly benefited from this dialogue on the cycle of soteriology, but this is not the only potential area for dialogue moving forward.

Given the fruits of this project, which has included many of the most problematic Reformed theological concepts, it would be useful to use a similar approach in other theological areas. There is no reason why the dialogue should stop here. It could continue into the rest of systematic theology. Other theologians have already advanced the process-Reformed dialogue in many areas, but a process-Reformed full systematic theology is an intriguing concept, one that deserves exploration in the future. Of course, several important doctrines must be considered in dialogue before a full systematic theology is achievable.

The Reformed doctrine of creation is one that would significantly benefit from dialogue with process thought. Instead of God being seen as the one who before time set all things into motion, God would be emphasized in God's role as the ongoing everlasting creator of reality, opening up space for the world to create itself in each moment. As briefly explored here through the doctrine of providence, God would still in some sense be said to be in control, since God is providing the initial aim that creates each moment's subjective experience and concrescence, and the Reformed tradition does include within the doctrine of creation the ongoing creation of reality. But through dialogue with process theology, God can be seen as a transcendentally immanent God constantly creating, rather than as a distant God creating once-and-for-all before time. And through dialogue on creation, process theology could more authoritatively reclaim the language of creator for God.

Reformed eschatology, although very briefly addressed in this project as an area of remaining difference, is another doctrine that could benefit from meaningful dialogue with process thought. Although likely an area in which there will always be some disagreement

between process and Reformed theologies, they can still learn from one another in dialogue. Like with a dialogue on creation, the Reformed tradition could learn to emphasize more strongly the realized eschatology occurring in every moment, even if the possibility of a final eschatological event never fully disappears from Reformed theology. And through an eschatological dialogue, perhaps process theology could be more open to the speculative possibility of God's will eventually being fully achieved in the world, and what that might look like.

Ecclesiology and theological anthropology are other major doctrines that would have positive developments from a dialogue between process thought and the Reformed tradition. Although left relatively untouched by this project, moving the Reformed tradition from substance metaphysics to process philosophy would have a significant impact on the tradition's understanding of humanity and the church. The Reformed tradition would still proclaim both the profound need of humanity for a savior and the covenantal relationship of God with humanity that forms the basis of the human institution of the church, but through process thought it could learn to see humanity as meaningfully free in its choice of response to God even while reliant on God, and to see the covenantal relationship between God and humanity in the terms of a real relationship of partners. The process tradition could learn also learn from this dialogue with Reformed theologians, such as the emphasis of humanity's reliance on God.

These doctrines are just an extremely brief overview of the future possibilities for process-Reformed dialogue and collaboration. At first glance these traditions seem to be very dissimilar, but that just means that they have much that they can learn from one another. The Reformed tradition perhaps has more to learn than process thought, as it struggles to leave behind the problematic substance metaphysics that has held back Reformed theology from being all that it could be. Process thought offers Reformed theology the resources it needs to discard

substance metaphysics in order to follow more truly the Christocentric revelation that the Reformed tradition has always endeavored to embody. And the Reformed tradition gives to process thought a significantly different dialogue partner from the others it normally has, allowing process theology to grow along new avenues and become broader as a tradition.

In conclusion, by bringing the process thought exemplified by Alfred North Whitehead into dialogue with Reformed theology as seen in Karl Barth and Shirley Guthrie, the problematic Reformed soteriological concepts of divine sovereignty, total depravity, divine providence, and election can be understood in more adequate terms for the world in which we live through the lens of process thought's conceptions of novelty and divine natures, while also providing process thought with points of commonality and with unique emphases through dialogue with the Reformed tradition since they are both reflecting the same soteriological cycle of movements in the God-world relationship. This was primarily achieved through the collaboration of both traditions in a process-Reformed statement to claim that God does not exist apart from the world, with both God and the world in static absolute states, but rather God moves into the world through God's omnipotent loving providential lure, resulting in the possibility of the world's enactment of God through the appearance of Christ's creative transformation, culminating in God resurrecting the world into everlasting unity within God's self by election into the consequent nature, which simultaneously is also God's movement into the world. As was expected, Reformed and process thought were not found to be in total agreement, each emphasizing different aspects of theology even when they are in general agreement. In total, it was shown that on major theological elements there were three points of agreement, six of similarity, and three of difference. These differences should be held together as differences, since no one theological system is capable of exhausting the depth and breadth of God. They can be

left to disagree positively alongside their agreements. For both process thought and the Reformed tradition, God moves lovingly into the world to guide it, the world responds, and God brings the world into unity with God, in the process starting the cycle over again. They may use different language in describing this reality, but the same movements in the God-world relationship are described by sovereignty and parts of the primordial nature, by the world without novelty and total depravity, by providence and the divine lure, by novelty and Christ, and by election and the consequent nature. These terms are not identical, but each can be used to describe and influence the best possible understanding of the other. In this way, both process thought and the Reformed tradition can grow and learn from one another as each seeks to develop as complete as possible an exploration and explanation of the revelation of God that is in accord with how we experience the world.

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